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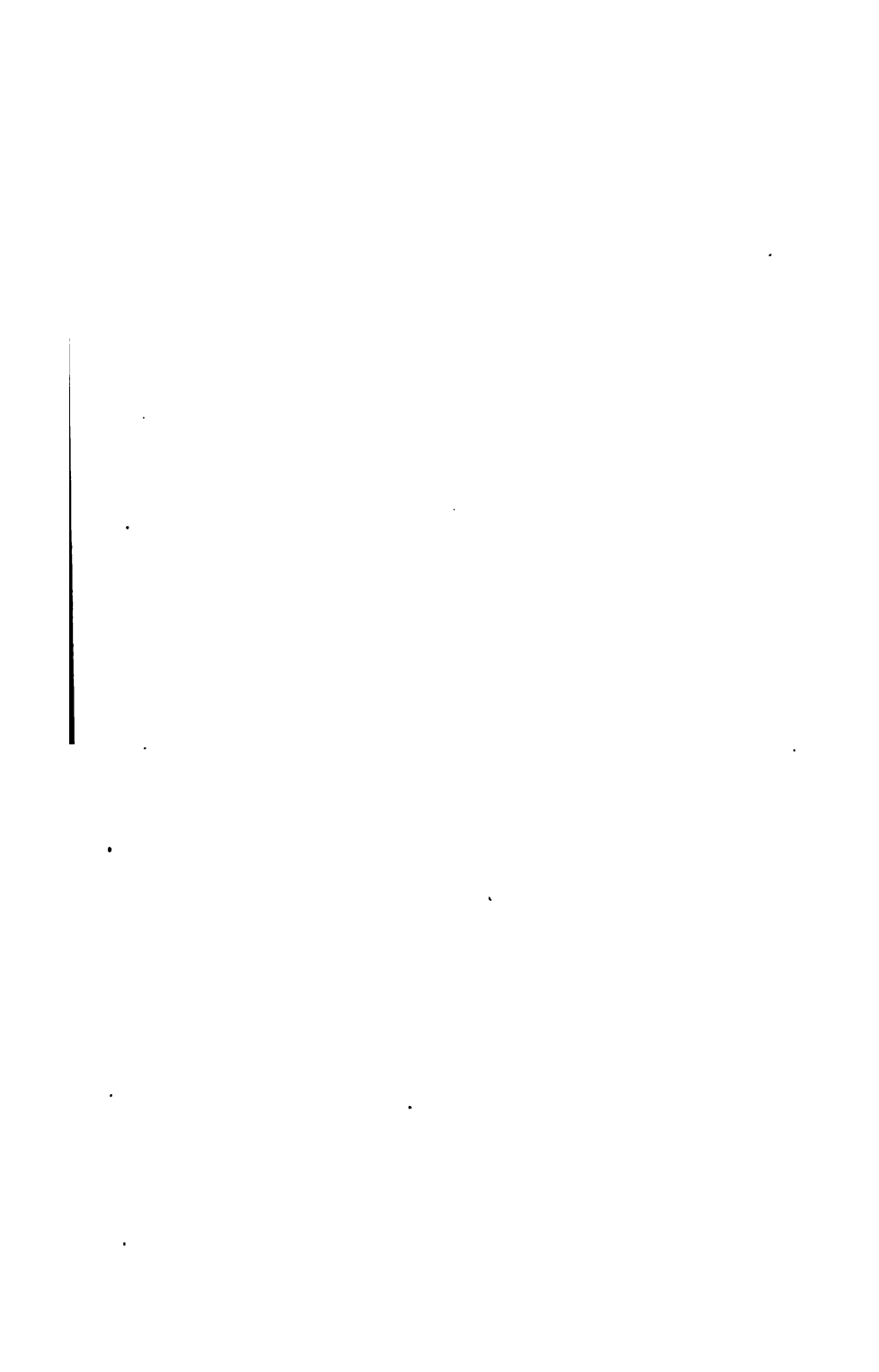
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ANNALS OF AN EVENTFUL LIFE.

VOLUME II.



ANNALS OF AN EVENTFUL LIFE.

Then take the Spring while it is Spring,
Live warm in Summer while it glows,
Nor wait till Winter comes as king
With crown of thorns that bear no rose.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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ANNALS OF AN EVENTFUL LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW WE SPENT OUR SEASON.

MY Aunt was not yet down, but the plague of housemaids had come and gone. I wished for half-an-hour for breakfast and the newspaper, and they both came at once.

My Aunt was very good about the Chichesters. She went and called on them that very day, and there was the usual return visit; but it was some time before I had an opportunity of being alone with Arethusa.

On the whole, we had a very pleasant season; we knew all Warwickshire and the bordering counties. There were no 'Warwickshire scandals,' thank God, in those days. We were all very well behaved, and very great friends.

The Chichesters knew all Devonshire and all Cornwall; but in those days Cornwall did not come much to town. Between us, therefore, we knew a good many people. They introduced us to their friends, and we did the same good turn to them with ours.

You must remember that my Aunt had not been in town for the season for years, so that she had, as it were, to start afresh in London society. But though hard to know, every one who really knew her liked her; she was so straightforward, and yet so feminine. It was that straightforwardness which led our old nurse to compare her to a 'rampaging cow' when I was born. She had set her heart on my being a girl, and for years she could not help showing her disappointment; but long before I came to her she had become reconciled to the fact of my boyhood, and, like a wise woman, made the best of what she could not help. Besides, she was much older, and age had mellowed, and not soured her. She was good fruit, and improved with age, like wine; but I warn you again that she was as jealous as ever, and still had a will of her own when thwarted.

She used often to say that there were few persons with whom it was worth while to be angry, and that she could only be very angry with those whom she loved. For the rest of the world

—for servants and tradesmen, if they cheated her; for vulgar people, if they sinned against the rules of society; for fools, who said or did the wrong thing in the wrong place; for the great mass of the world, to whom she was in her heart indifferent, and who yet came into collision with her, in spite of all her efforts to keep the peace—she had plenty of mock anger: anger, as like real anger as stage thunder and lightning is to a real storm. She might scold them till you thought the roof would fall over their heads, but in truth it was all sham wrath—a very good imitation that frightened those who did not know her a good deal, but still a sham. Very proud she was, too, and not the least vain. There were so few things that she would stoop to that her whole life was like her figure, as upright as a dart; but no one knew the vanity of earthly things better than she did, and few were really so humble-minded in their heart of hearts.

We had very nice society, therefore—better in quality than quantity. One good point about Auntie was that she hated herds, and never would have more than ten people to dinner, a restriction which Brooks much deplored: ‘A-working and slaving, and cleaning the plate and laying the table, all for nothing.’

Still less would she cram her ‘mansion’ to

suffocation at a ball or *rout*. These drums and balls of the present time, at which you are lucky if you can get up as far as the first landing, would have been her detestation. No! she said she would leave room enough for people to show their things—for ladies to show their dresses, she meant—‘For my part,’ she often declared, ‘I like to see young people dance. None of your slipping and sliding for me; show your steps.’

I daresay many a young lady who reads this will call Aunt Mandeville ‘a horrid, old-fashioned fright,’ or ‘an awful bore,’ and me ‘a regular old foggy’ for recording such silly things; but Auntie is past their praise or blame, and as for me, I console myself with knowing that I am quite right. Life, it seems to me, even in a London season, is too short for a crush; and as for my Aunt’s fancy, that people like to show their things, I put it to any sensible, well-dressed woman who was at the Academy Reception in their new building last season, whether they were ever so well seen, or saw so well, at any party of the season,—not excepting the Indian and Foreign Office receptions,—which came next to the Academy; while as for your great houses, however great, their drums, balls, or receptions, from Marlborough House down, were mere crams and crushes. ‘This will be the end of old dresses,’ said Lady

Sweetapple at the Academy. ‘How glad I am that I have on a new dress.’

And very lovely, I am bound to say, did Lady Sweetapple look in Wirth’s very last, which, I believe, you may get not very far from Belgrave Square, without all the fuss and bother of going or sending to Paris for them. Some ladies, I know, like going to Paris to be measured—for not to be measured is to have a misfit;—but others do not; or their husbands and fathers do not; and so let them thank me for this information.

• So what with the Pennyroyals of Cheshire, and the Lurdanes and Merediths of Warwickshire, and the Whitey-Browns of Oxfordshire,—a very old family are the Whitey-Browns; they came in with the Conqueror, and set up the first paper-mill, on the tenure of presenting Norman William and his successors with three quires of note-paper at their coronation for ever,—and the Quarendons of Devonshire, and Arethusa’s Aunt Buller; with all these, I say, and their friends, and their friends’ friends, we had very agreeable society all that season. I could tell you a good deal of what I saw and learnt in London; of all my virtues and good behaviour; but I prefer to tell you more of Arethusa.

One thing, though, I daresay you would like to know. I have given you a description of

Arethusa, and how she looked. Wouldn't you like to know what manner of young man I was? I hear you say, 'Do tell us.' So I begin.

It is a long, long way to look back upon, and as no one man or woman knows exactly what they are like,—all looking-glasses are so deceptive, I daresay this description of myself, when I was just about two-and-twenty, will either go much beyond or fall far short of the original; but as you wish me to make the attempt, you say you will make it easier for me by asking me questions. I don't know that that will make it any easier; but put your questions, and I will try to answer them.

How tall was I?

A thorough woman's question; always thinking of six feet. I was not six feet; between five feet nine and ten,—what I daresay you call a dwarf, you who have set your heart on marrying a Life-Guardsman; and yet I'll be bound my heart is as big as that of any Life-Guardsman, let alone the fact that very tall men are subject to varicose veins and other drawbacks, and string-halts. You don't know what 'varicose veins' are. Then there's all the more reason that you should ask any doctor if he would advise you to marry a man with varicose veins, and see what he says. They are of very respectable antiquity. They came in long before the Conquest. Marius had

them when he was sitting in the ruins of Carthage; and much, no doubt, they added to his misery; in fact, if he had not had them, he would never have sat in the ruins of Carthage at all. He would have run away; but having them, he was obliged to sit down; and so would have lost his life, had he not looked so fiercely at the executioner, that he could not lay hand on him.

What was the colour of my hair?

Brown, dark brown; not so dark as Arethusa's; nor with so many gold threads in it; but brown dashed with gold. We were too alike, then, to suit one another, you say. Don't be in a hurry; we are still a long way from being married. Let us return to my hair. You must know that all my life my hair has been my weak point. In this I was a regular Halfacre or Harfager, or Fair Hair,—that I was always known by the extraordinary abundance of my hair, which fell round my forehead and neck in great locks. I don't mean those taggy, effeminate curls which you see on some fellows, but locks as soft as silk. I hate hair as coarse as horsehair. Mine was none of your Spanish hair, out of which you might make a scrubbing-brush. You might have squeezed it all up at once into your hand, and when you opened your palm, it would all have flown out in a great flood of hair.

My complexion? was not so white as Arethusa's,—more ruddy, but fresh and fair.

My nose? was ordinary, as the passports say.

My eyes? very like Aunt Mandeville's,—a bright dark brown; very soft when I was pleased, which, of course, I was very often; and very fierce, nay savage, when angry, which was very seldom.

My figure was slight and slim, but I was much stronger than I looked, as one or two sons of Belial who have provoked me in life have found. Still I was no Hercules, though I could swim pretty well, and go through all the sports and games of life decently. I think I liked riding better than anything else, and you know what that ridiculous Oxford tutor said of my hunting the fox in June. For the rest, I had good teeth, small ears, and small hands and feet; and to answer all your inquisitive questions at once, I passed muster at a ball, or dinner, or on horseback, or out shooting, or on the water, or at cricket, or tennis, pretty well. But I was not an Admirable Crichton. I daresay you will be spiteful enough to say that I was not half good-looking enough for Arethusa, and I am ready, even at this distance of time, to admit it; but then you must remember that I am a lover drawing Arethusa's portrait, and perhaps if you had seen my picture drawn by any one who was as much in love with me as I was with

her, you would find it much better-looking than I could dare to draw it. Go to! There is still some modesty left in the world. When she retired from the rising generation, she took refuge with the old fogies.

One thing you have forgotten to ask: Could I dance? Yes; and if I may say so, I danced well. I have every reason to believe that I was in those days a very nice partner. Of one thing I am quite sure,—I was no ‘crusher.’ I did not dash along regardless of time and tune, dragging my partner with me, making their things fly about, and too often tearing them, as, I grieve to say, I have remarked to be the practice of too many young men. It was only this very last season, at Lady Pagoda’s ball. You all know Lady Pagoda, who has that enormous diamond tiara. It was only at her last ball that I saw one of these crushers dash into the *mélée*, as he called it, with a fair young girl in her first season. He clawed her round the waist like a gorilla,—I mean that he was the gorilla, of course,—and tore round and round like a mad thing. A very few turns and his unhappy partner came out as ‘ragged as a cuckoo,’ as a very vulgar hunting squire, whom Lady Pagoda had stupidly invited, remarked with great brutality. Old Lady Onechicken was standing by me with her only daughter, the great

heiress, and when she saw this dreadful exhibition she muttered to herself, 'What a terrible man!' Let not that crusher ever make up to Miss Onechicken. I warn him Lady Onechicken would as soon think of giving her daughter in marriage to a long-handed ape as to him.

But on the honour of a good partner, I was no crusher, and Arethusa said that I danced 'extremely well.' I could see, too, that the mammas had no aversion to me, and that their daughters liked me to dance with them. There were two or three fellows of my own age, who despised dancing, and yet went to balls. They used to stand behind the folding-doors, or in corners of ball-rooms, or on balconies, or landings, and very, very frequently in refreshment and supper-rooms. But wherever they were, they were always in the way. One of them in particular was very offensive. He would cross the ball-room right in the midst of a waltz. The consequence was that he was bumped up against here, and kicked there, and cannoned against, and hustled so long as he was in the fair-way of the waltzers, a couple or two of whom he sometimes contrived to throw down, making what he called 'a jolly game of sacks in the mill;' but on the whole, like the cow on the railway, he generally got the worst of it, for if he escaped being tripped up himself, he only fell into the hands of angry

mothers and *chaperons*, who scolded him most fearfully for crossing the ball-room at that critical moment.

‘What dances did we dance?’ Well! we were great waltzers. There were some quadrilles, and occasional lancers, and mazurkas; but the great difference between the dancing of that day and this was that polking was unknown. We danced Sir Roger de Coverley pretty much as you dance it now, only to my mind not so ridiculously. But of all the dances in the world, I say there is nothing like a waltz, when, being a good dancer yourself, you have a young and pretty girl for your partner, who can dance well. It is quite a mistake to suppose that all young ladies can dance well,—just as it is to suppose that they can all play well.

Did Arethusa dance well? Very well. She was quite the nicest partner I ever had. With such a good ear, and such intelligence in waltzing. It was very different waltzing with any one else. That was all love, and love is blind, you say. She had faults in dancing, as in other things, only I could not see them. No, it was not love; it was truth. She was the best partner I ever had, either at home or abroad.

It is time to tell you something about Arethusa. The last you heard of her was that she was asleep

somewhere in South Street. Very true; it is a dull, stupid story. Who cares for a man's old love of more than twenty years ago? It is quite wonderful that he cares for her himself. Why not throw her off out of his memory, as the Top did the Ball in Andersen's story? Ah! why not?

CHAPTER II.

HOW I HAD IT OUT WITH ARETHUSA.

I HAVE already told you that Arethusa and I saw one another often all that season. When I found I could see her almost every day, and certainly every other night, I left off getting up with the sweeps, and pacing up and down South Street at unseasonable hours. I got more and more fond of her, and she seemed always very glad to see me, but it was a long time before I got a chance of having an explanation with her, or an opportunity of discovering her feelings. I have always said that one week in a country-house was worth a whole London season for finding out the condition of a young lady's affections. In London we are so shut up and confined in our brick boxes, that we can do nothing without being seen or heard. In fact, as there are few houses large enough in London for receptions, there are still fewer in which a man can make love. It is perfectly true that Love laughs at London houses just as heartily as he does at locksmiths; but then he is very often sulky in town,

and won't laugh at all; but take him into the country, and you will find him all smiles. What he loves best is freedom. Love is a great radical and revolutionist. He hates the four walls of dining-rooms and drawing-rooms. Open-air meetings are his delight. If he revives a little on a landing, or a conservatory, or a tea-room, or even a cloak-room, ten to one he is put out of countenance, and obliged to wear a mask by some horrid old tabby of either sex, who, instead of passing on, or through, or taking a cup of tea, or cloaking her silly old self, lingers there and listens to all that Love has to say. So, to spite her, he says nothing but 'good-night,' puts on his hat, and is gone. In old days, if he saw a cat crossing the square, he would throw a stone at her for the old tabby's sake; but if he did any such wicked deed now the police would take him up. In fact, in these days of fellow-feeling for asses and other animals, one might as well stone an old tabby herself as a cat in the streets.

'Oh, that Auntie would ask Arethusa and her father down to Mandeville Hall, to shoot partridges in September.' That was a form of prayer that I very often repeated. It was my special prayer 'against dearth,' and 'for rain,' and 'fair weather,' all in one.

But though I hoped for this invitation with a

very fervent hope, I did not neglect any opportunity of being alone with Arethusa. Once, when the Chichesters dined with us, and the Colonel was about to take his daughter downstairs, I persuaded Scatterbrains, who had dined with us, and who was always a good fellow, to decoy the Colonel down the back stairs, to show him a new rifle in my den. He went off as innocent as a lamb with my confederate, supposing that Arethusa would stay where she was till he returned. But as soon as his back was turned, I told Arethusa that she ought to go down; her father would not be a minute, and would be waiting for her in the hall. Down we went, and found no Colonel. It was not at all likely that we should, for Scatterbrains was particularly enjoined to show him the lock and the trigger, and the barrel and the nipple, and to take the barrel off the stock, and explain a curious breechloading movement that it had. It was, in fact, one of the earliest breechloaders—in that there was no deception. The trick lay only in insisting upon showing it there and then to the old sportsman.

So far, the plot succeeded; and yet it was, so far as Arethusa and myself were concerned, a miserable failure. Why? All because of Brooks, who would come after us into the library of the ‘mansion,’ just to see if Miss Chichester had her ‘things all right that wet night.’ I had already

despatched my Aunt's maid upstairs on a wild-goose chase after Arethusa's gloves, which she said she knew she had put down somewhere before playing a piece. She little knew that I had them all the while in my pocket.

And yet here was all this ingenuity wasted and another golden chance gone, because Brooks, who was far too stupid and conceited to take a hint, would stand there with Arethusa's cloak in his hand, as staunch as any pointer, and resolved to keep the field till Colonel Chichester appeared, talking at a great rate to Scatterbrains, who could not help laughing at my face of disgust.

At the same moment, down ran Mrs. Curl, to say 'she couldn't find Miss Chichester's gloves nowhere.' All that was to be done was to cloak her in the presence of four or five witnesses, to sympathise with her loss—crocodile that I was!—with her gloves in my pocket, to assure her that if found they should be sent—which of course they were next day,—to hand her to their carriage, to be laughed at by Scatterbrains, and to go to bed cursing Brooks as the marplot of my destiny.

I forgot to tell you that Arethusa had long before that made it all right about that horrid Aunt Buller and the 10th down in Devonshire. So far from being hospitable, her Aunt never had a single party all the winter, nor did one of the

10th enter the house. Aunt Buller was first of all laid up with a swollen face—the mumps, in short—which Arethusa caught.

‘That spoilt my beauty for a long time,’ she said, ‘and after that I had one cold after the other, and all so bad that I scarce stirred out of the house all the winter and spring. That was really the reason why papa never went to hunt at Leamington.’

How unjust I had been to her! While she was suffering I had been accusing her of flirting with a whole regiment of old partners. I ought to have believed better things of her.

But pray observe how much in love I must have been with her when she made this declaration of ill health. If a man’s affection can survive an attack of that most unromantic of diseases, the mumps, which may truly be said to be all pain and no honour; a malady even more ridiculous than a toothache. If he can, besides the mumps, outlive four or five bad colds running, he must be over head and ears in love with the afflicted object of his affections. Quite different from Victor Hugo’s fine gentleman, who went and blew his brains out because some one asked after his cold. It was such a very dishonourable disease!

But at last I had my chance, and used it. It was at Chiswick. You don’t know where Chis-

wick is! That only shows how young you must be. Suppose I said at the Royal Horticultural Gardens at South Kensington, would you know where I meant? Of course you would. It is where the Rose Shows and the American Plants are, and where the receptions are chiefly attended by Market Gardeners and Seedsmen. They had the impudence to have one the very night of the Academy reception last season. Well, don't be in a passion; even Market Gardeners and Seedsmen must have receptions sometimes. Don't grudge them their bonnets and clogs. But in my day Chiswick was what the Horticultural Gardens now are, only a great deal better. Besides, there was the Duke of Devonshire's villa and grounds, which on grand occasions were thrown open to the public. Many a rare tree my poor father sent to these gardens, and it used to be a melancholy pleasure to go and look at them. The company at the *fêtes* was very good, too. There were no Botanic Gardens to divert horticultural attention; just as there was then but one Opera at the old house in the Haymarket. Neither in floriculture nor in bravuras were the public, as now, between two bundles of hay, unable to make up their minds which to choose, and so choosing to go to neither. One used to drive down to Chiswick, and ride down to it, and very pleasant it was—if you could

find your carriage or your groom on coming back.

See what explanations your ridiculous youth forces me to give. It was at Chiswick, at the Horticultural Fête, at the end of June 183—, that I had it out with Arethusa. We went thither: I, protected by Aunt Mandeville, and Arethusa by her father. In these days I know it is quite absurd to suppose that young ladies ever want protection. That has entirely disappeared; there is now free trade in love as well as in everything else. That kind of protection is extinct. Our young ladies and old mammas, like our merchants, buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest markets. That is why you see the Duke of Doubloon marrying Miss Pennyfarthing, a half-educated thing that would be dear at any money, yet he pays enormously for her. That is what I call free trade in marriage. An article of that kind speaks for itself. It is every man's money, and as for protection, it is the man rather than the woman who needs it. Who will bring in a Bill for the relief of distressed bridegrooms?

But then there was protection. No one went anywhere without their natural protectors. But still, even then, it was possible to give one's natural guardians the slip, especially if love felt strong and healthy in his open air. And so it happened that

day. The flowers, and the fruit, and the parterres, were lovely. The Colonel had been in India, and my Aunt was an ardent floriculturist. He led her away, with a temperature out-of-doors at 80° in the shade, into an orchid house to show her—no, not the *Victoria Regia*, that had not yet been discovered—no matter, it was something that answered to that lily; something which, for a floriculturist not to have seen, was set down in a phrase which Lord Brougham had just invented, as ‘crass ignorance.’ Neither the Colonel nor my Aunt was going to be thought capable of ‘crass ignorance.’ It was the right thing to say that you had seen the ‘*Gutta Serena*,’—suppose we call it by that name,—and so the Colonel went to say that he had seen it. If it had been the *Amaurosis Caligans*, it would been all the same to him. My Aunt wished to see it, for her love of flowers was great; so they both plunged into that forcing-house, into an atmosphere like that of a Turkish bath. As for *Arethusa* and myself, we were warm enough already. We were not going to be boiled to death. I, at any rate, was fair enough and red enough already, and I feared I might come out like a lobster if I went into that pit, which was as the burning fiery furnace, and crammed with an admiring crowd. We held aloof then, and, instead of waiting for them, passed on into the crowd, looked at this bed and that, turned

down an alley or two to the right, and two more to the left, found ourselves under a shady beech, where there was welcome shade, and neither flowers nor fine people—and, in one word, were lost for a season.

It is very odd, under such circumstances, how soon one makes up one's mind to be lost. It never struck me, at least, that the Colonel and Aunt Mandeville might be looking for us. If they were, and could not find us, we had a ready excuse—we were lost and had been looking for them. At last, tired with the quest, we had followed the directions of the Humane Society for persons who are lost, 'Sit down under a tree and wait till they find you.'

You say you never heard of any such directions issued by the Humane Society for persons who are lost. You know what they say about drowning persons, 'Don't roll the body on casks or kick it, or hold it with its head down,' or many other things which no one is ever likely to do; but, as for these directions for the lost, you never heard of them. All that I can say is that I believe they do exist, and, if they don't, they ought to exist. If you don't sit down you may be both running after one another for hours; but if you sit still they must find you, though it may be a long while first.

Those were the arguments which I made use of with Arethusa, when it broke upon our minds that we were lost. She thought them quite conclusive. Whether she hoped it might be a long time first was not so evident, but I am sure I most cordially hoped it.

So there I was, sitting down before the citadel which I was resolved to take, and with no one to relieve the fortress before I could carry it by assault.

All attacks on fortifications begin, I believe, by a flying sap. Perhaps, as everything is altered, flying saps come last now—your last parallel first; but if so, it was not so when I sat down before Arethusa. You must know that I was quite ignorant of the strength of the garrison, though, as even the Duke of Wellington had his first and fruitless siege of Badajoz, and the failure at Burgos, I had already had some experience of Arethusa's power of self-defence. I had, in fact, attempted to carry a first-class fortress by a rush, an escalade without regular approaches, and I had been beaten off. This time I proceeded according to the rules and regulations of Vauban or Cohorn, or both.

As soon, therefore, as we sat down, I began operations by a flying sap, and my first trace was:

‘We have seen much of each other, Miss Chichester.’

Who would have thought that so innocent an observation could work so much mischief? It was as if the garrison of Jülich, which, I believe, is one of the strongest places in the world, should look over their earth-works, and see a knot of French sappers disguised as boors working in a green meadow with pickaxe and shovel. If they thought anything of the occurrence, it might be to laugh at the awkwardness of the rustics.

‘Just so,’ Arethusa replied, in a half-mocking way. ‘Do you think so, Mr. Halfacre?’

My flying sap finished, I instantly began to trace my first parallel and to get under cover.

‘We have known one another more than a year.’ This was a story, for it was only eleven months; but it was necessary to make use of a little inequality in the ground to seize a mound of vantage. And this was best done by a bold assertion.

‘I did not think it had been quite so long,’ said Arethusa, dreamily; ‘but it is no matter.’

This was a sally on the part of the garrison to feel the enemy’s intentions, and to find out if his attack were serious; I ought, of course, to have gone on with my second parallel, and not have rushed out of the trenches to drive the enemy back. But once again I swarmed out of my cover and attacked her in the open.

‘Do you mean to say, Arethusa, that it does not matter how long we have known each other?’

Before I could reach the foe he was back again behind his earth-works. His object was gained; all he wished to know was whether this was a real attack.

Arethusa looked very hard at me, and said:

‘Now, listen to me, Edward Halfacre. I don’t call you Edward, and I don’t like you to call me Arethusa. Not yet, at least—I mean not at all. I have known you long enough to like you; but not enough for what you mean. I know very well what you were going to say, and I hope, for my sake, you will not say it. There is a time for all things, and the time for this has not come yet. There, now! don’t expect me to say any more.’

This was a needless request, for the Directions to the Lost held quite good, whether issued by the Humane Society or not. In the distance, but not so very far off, appeared Colonel Chichester and Aunt Mandeville, who, having satisfied their curiosity as to the *Amaurosis Caligans*, were now in full chase of the lost ones.

‘It shall be as you say,’ I said, mournfully, to Arethusa. ‘But may I not hope?’

‘Hope springs eternal in the human breast,’ said Arethusa, smiling, and rising with a spring as if the elastic turf had lifted her up. ‘I am not

going to disprove what Enfield's Speaker affirms. But not a word of this ; and no Arethusas.'

'My dear Toosy,' said the Colonel, 'where have you been?'

'Nowhere,' said Arethusa, with a dexterity that would have graced an attorney-general. 'Nowhere. We were waiting for you.'

'We only just went into house No. 6,' said my Aunt, 'to see the *Gutta Serena* and *Amaurosis Caligans*, those new discoveries in botany, and when we came out you were nowhere to be found.'

'That is just what I said, dear Mrs. Mandeville,' said Arethusa, with still greater cleverness. 'I said we went nowhere, and you say we were nowhere to be found. We were, in fact, just where you said we were.'

'I don't quite see that, Toosy,' said the Colonel ; 'you must have been somewhere.'

'And that somewhere was here, waiting for you, dearest papa, till you had seen those rare plants. As for me, I really cannot go into those stuffy forcing-houses ; I always feel ready to faint.'

All this while I stood rooted to the ground, and said nothing, but my admiration for Arethusa increased every minute. She had found out my intentions, foiled my attack, and left me in a

delightful state of doubt and uncertainty as to her feelings. I might hope or not hope, as I pleased. I might fill up my trenches and retire from before the place. And then the next minute she was engaging,—light frigate that she was!—two such old three-deckers as the Colonel and Aunt Mandeville, and had given them such a warm reception that they were forced to sheer off.

‘Well,’ said the Colonel, when Arethusa’s encounter with Aunt Mandeville was over, ‘we had better get home as soon as we can. It will take a long time to get the carriages up, and if we don’t take care we shall be late for dinner.’

So saying,—selfish old fellow that he was!—he made a profound bow to my Aunt, and walked off with his daughter, who gave me a look of intelligence as she went, as much as to say, ‘Remember what I told you.’ Why did he go off in that base way, and leave me alone with Aunt Mandeville, and without the protection of Arethusa?

When they were gone I walked silently alongside of Aunt Mandeville, who said nothing till we had found our carriage and were driving back to town. When we had got just opposite to what was then the New Church at Turnham Green, she turned sharp round on me, and said, glaring at me with her fierce brown eyes :

‘Is there anything between you and Arethusa Chichester?’

This she said in the voice that the wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus might be supposed to have uttered, could she have spoken, and had she come upon the bold Sabine who carried them off.

‘No, Auntie,’ I said; ‘nothing.’

It was the very truth, but not the whole truth. There *was* nothing *between* us. Arethusa’s refusal to listen to my proposition had hindered that; but *towards* her I had all the devotion of the fondest lover. And here see how useful it is for a lover to know the force of the English prepositions. By a skilful use of them I could lead Aunt Mandeville astray, and yet continue to worship Arethusa in my heart.

To my surprise, knowing how really guilty I felt, Aunt Mandeville was satisfied with this denial. The brown eyes became soft, the wolf-sowl departed from her face, and all the way up to town she was as kind and gracious to me as ever. Poor Auntie, she forgot the force of the prepositions when she said *between*, and gave me a loophole out of which to wriggle. Had she said, ‘Do you love Arethusa Chichester?’ it would have been quite another thing, and I felt I must have faltered out ‘Yes;’ but the blessed word ‘between’ saved me. No! there is no part of

English grammar that lovers ought to study more closely than the chapter 'On the Force of the Prepositions.'

That night we met the Chichesters out at dinner, and afterwards we all went to a ball at Lady Onechicken's. I sat next to Arethusa at dinner, but not a single word passed between us of what had happened under that beech at Chiswick. I did, indeed, say something in praise of the clever way in which she had got us out of the blame of being lost; but all she said was:

'Was it clever? I did not know it.'

At Lady Onechicken's I danced one quadrille, two waltzes, and the Lancers with Arethusa. The quadrille and one waltz were before supper, and the others after. I got the second waltz because the partner to whom she was engaged thought more of his supper than of his waltz, and only appeared when our waltz was half over, with a piece of lobster sticking in his moustache. I saw it, and rejoiced to find that he was one of that odious 10th up on leave from Exeter.

'Very sorry, Captain Martingale,' said Arethusa; 'but if you will stay down in the supper-room, you can't expect me to wait for you.'

'Do you never wait?' replied the Captain, who ought, from the style of his rejoinder, to have been in a heavy regiment.

‘Never!’ was the answer, as we began to spin round again, and then, in a much lower voice, which seemed meant for me: ‘Never, except for people worth waiting for.’

The Colonel, by the time the Lancers were over, had done his whist, and was ready to go. So was my Aunt, so was Arethusa, and so I need not say was I when Arethusa was gone.

Dear me! I went to bed weary, but sleepless. All that night I lay awake, wondering whether Arethusa did care for me a little just in the very bottom of her heart.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE SEASON CAME TO AN END.

AFTER this, somehow or other, I did not care to stay much longer in town. July was upon us. My Aunt had not been away so long for twenty years from Mandeville Hall. She was eager to get back. Her object in coming to town had been fully gained. I had quite recovered my health, and until that Chiswick fête my spirits had been all that could be desired. I was ready to go; Brooks and the servants were ready to go; and it was settled that we should go about the 15th of July. Seasons were not so exhausting then as they are now, but at all times, after the mad heat of June, July leaves you little but the dregs of the season. Still, before we do go, let me describe a London dinner of peculiar atrocity. When I say it was given by a dean — the Dean of Dunderhead; not the Dean either of London or of Westminster; not a rural dean, but the Dean of Dunder-

head—you see at once that we ought to have had a very good dinner, and so I expected it to be. In a little while you shall hear what sort of dinner it was, but first let me describe the company. I know an incumbent of the West End, who always couples the word ‘important’ with any aristocratic gathering. There was a very ‘important’ party at Lady A.’s; or the Duke of B. had a very ‘important circle to dinner;’ or ‘I am going to read prayers with a “very important” member of my congregation.’ Well! the Dean’s was a very ‘important’ dinner. He himself was ‘important,’—none of your 2000*l.* a-year deans, but a real dignitary of the Church. Then there were the Earl of Richborough and his wife, both most ‘important’ people, made still more ‘important’ by the fact that the Earl had thirty thousand acres in a ring-fence. There, too, was Archdeacon Malison, that very rabid Churchman, who is always declaiming about Convocation, and that is a subject on which even an archdeacon cannot always talk at dinner. Then there was Mr. Starchshanks, the Dean’s banker, a vulgar bullet-headed man, the back of whose neck was swollen like the head of the puff-adder. Our banker wore a curious diaper velvet waistcoat, which I believe was woven out of crossed cheques. He

was a lover of china, and fancied he knew what a good dinner was; poor fellow, how I pitied him! Then, there were the Dean's wife, and Lady Richborough, and the banker's wife—a great deal too good for him,—and the Archdeacon's wife—too bad for any one, a thing all toque and turban, with a huge gold chain round her neck. Then there was a young guardsman, who could not speak, and a young lady who could, and one or two others of either sex, fat and sleek, that looked like cotton-wool, in which we were to be all packed at dinner lest we should break. Those were all? No! I have forgotten another, who came in just as dinner was announced, a long and dull speaker, the Protestant Member for Dunderhead, who,—it was on a Wednesday in the Session,—had just been sending the Pope and his Jesuits to a place that shall be nameless, in a speech which bored the House for hours. After the House rose he had attended a meeting of the Ladies' Committee for Converting the College of Cardinals to Protestantism by Counter-irritation, and there he had electrified those good people by telling them how he once nearly trod off the Pope's toe when he was presented to him at the Vatican, instead of kissing it before the Puseyites, those wolves in sheep's clothing. We were glad

that he came, for the conversation had not been lively, and was, in fact, monosyllabic, 'Oh' and 'Yes' being the largest words uttered by some of the party, and even these with an expression of fatigue, as though the speaker had just scaled the Matterhorn. But I bore up, for was there not a good dinner coming? At length a solemn bald-headed man threw open the door, and almost whispered, 'Dinner is served.' There was a little excitement, and the lady in the toque nodded it to and fro 'with a short, uneasy motion,' like the Ancient Mariner's ship;—by the way, it slipped a little to one side, and made its wearer a most absurd figure for the rest of the evening. No woman offered to set it right, perhaps because they were all too hungry to see it.

Down we went in double file to the dining-room. It was a long coffin-like apartment, a little Eaton Place in short, a street in which one always feels as I fancy the grave must feel. It was a long, and not a round table,—a sure sign of a dull party. If you have wit, or wisdom, or beauty at your board, by all means have a round table, especially if you have a good dinner as well; but if your party was like the Dean of Dunderhead's party, let the table be oblong. At a round table every one can see every one else, and all hear what every one says. So if there be a fool of the company,

or a lady with a pig's face, or a pair of lovers, or anything horrible and hideous, you find it out at once, and there is a fly in the ointment. But at a long table, if there be fools, they may not sit next you; if there be ogres, they need not sit opposite to you; if there be a bore who will not hold his tongue, you may not hear him. Add to which, if you are so silly as to be in love, you may, if fate and the mistress of the house manage matters well, sit next to the object of your affections, and have her pretty much to yourself. No lover, bore, fright, or fool, ought to be suffered to sit at a round table, but as even these guilty wretches must dine somewhere, they are least offensive at an oblong one. Thank heaven, the Dean's was an oblong table. As ill-luck would have it, my lot fell to sit over against the lady with the sidelong toque, and as I gazed at her it ever seemed to slip more and more on one side. On one side of me was the Archdeacon, and on the other the Member for Dunderhead. Somehow all the men and women had got together like court-cards in an unshuffled pack. Two or three frantic efforts were made by Mrs. Dean to shuffle them. The Archdeacon tried to run across, and the banker puffed like a steam-engine, trying to get away from his wife's side, but it was all no good.

We remained helplessly 'clubbed,' like a Volunteer regiment in these latter days trying to get out of Hyde Park; we all sank down on our seats 'as we were;' the Dean gave a short grace, and the repast began.

During all our troubles I repeated one short prayer, 'Thank heaven, we shall have a good dinner,' for my faith was large in the Church. And now came the proof. There were no oysters, — in a layman a venial, but in a dignitary of the Church an unpardonable sin. Can a dean who does not begin his dinner with oysters be sound on the question of fasting in Lent? A grave question; for as sneezing represents the last traces of a mortal influenza, of which, as the Targums assure us, all the patriarchs, Methuselah included, died, and as the Sergeant-at-Law's coif is the last relic of the monk's cowl and the benefit of clergy, so doth the oyster-eating of our ecclesiastics represent the last rags and remnants of Popish fasting in the English Church. No ritualist would have omitted oysters before meat, but our Dean was no ritualist, so we had no oysters. But we had soup? Of course we had, and such a mess! — something that looked like melted size, and smelled and tasted accordingly, with parboiled carrots, contending for their vegetable life, swim-

ming about in it, came round to me. I swallowed it down, for I was an hungered, but it was pain and grief to me. It was downright glue and gelatine. Then I looked, and not only looked, but looked round, for a glass of wine. It was very rude,—I know it; but if there be one article of faith laid down by all the doctors at every general council, and accepted by all, orthodox and heterodox alike, it is this, ‘After soup let sherry follow.’ Yet here, in a Dean’s house, and not that of Dean Close, be it remarked, no sherry followed. Yes! I looked round, but I could see nothing but that bald-headed butler’s back, washing his hands in a salad-bowl, or making the champagne, or doing some deed of darkness. A butler should be like a soldier: he should never show his back; he ought to be all front, ever in the van, pouring cool wine down the gullets of the guests when fatigued with eating. But this hairless condor of the desert never came with the sherry. My throat was dry as dust, and the fish came. Now, the sight of fish to a thirsty man is an empty mockery. A fish is an animal that lives in the water; its very sight is suggestive of something cool; it not only requires sherry before it, but sherry after it; it must have something to swim in even after it is eaten;—so that fish without wine is an abomination. Yet that wine never came. I forgot to say that the fish

itself was salmon—a female salmon that had wasted all her love on some ungrateful gravel-bed in the Spey, and whose flesh was white, stringy, and tasteless. She was as like a true salmon as a parsnip is to a carrot. What can that butler be at? I thought. Here we have been glued up, and never unglued; we have swallowed a slice of nasty garbage, which they call salmon, and still there is no wine. Had I been a Bedouin Chief, a tameless child of the desert, I would have made his caitiff head fly off with my yataghan; but I was a son of society, restrained by good breeding and the fear of the gallows, so I sat still, and cursed him. There was no conversation. The Archdeacon and the Member, who did not know glue from soup, or salmon from skate, had their mouths full, and could not speak. So I had time to watch this butler, though I nearly caught a crick in the neck in doing it. At last the wretch turned round, and showed his guilty face. Up he stalked from the sarcophagus at the end of the funereal chamber, and in his hand, or rather with both hands, he held a bottle. One would have thought, by his solemnity and sloth, that he had been high-priest of Halicarnassus, holding in his hands the precious alabaster vase marked with the cipher of Xerxes, which Artemisia filled with good drink for the use of her husband's ghost, and which the curious reader may

see in the innermost chamber of the British Museum, side by side with the Townley Vase. Slowly he came, and slowly he went round, as though performing a sacred but melancholy rite. We were fourteen, and, being a most expert arithmetician, like Michael Cassio, I at once calculated my chance—I was last but one in the round—of getting any of that bottle! I did get some, and this was how it was. His orders evidently were to make the wine go round, and he did it with a vengeance. Each man got half a glass, and some of the women none. I gulped down my share at once, for really I was like men who have been five days without water on a raft; I was *that* thirsty, I could have swallowed baboon's blood, let alone Marsala, as this wine was.

After the Marsala came the *entrées*, four of them, foul and frigid. The first *entrée* had the face of a sweetbread and the savour of a shoe. No Arctic traveller who devoured his boots ever had a tougher job. The second *entrée* had the form of a chicken and the taste of a cock. Twelve hours' boiling would not have turned him into a cocky-leekie. The third *entrée* had the face of a calf done *en fricandeau*, and the taste of a bull. No army contractor in the West Indies ever treated the troops with such beef. The fourth *entrée* had the face of a pigeon and the taste of a carrion crow.

I ate of them all on principle. 'Never refuse a dish because it is bad,' said my grandmother. 'If you do, how can you ever know a good one?' These dishes were handed round in great state by waiters who blew down the back of our necks. One asthmatic fellow, in particular, I could tell by his panting when he was three guests off. 'And all this while, what was the butler doing? Was there no more wine?' You may well ask. The wretch had turned his back on us again, and was working on at something, as we could see by the twitching of his elbows. At last, even the dignity of the Dean was roused. Six dishes, and only one bottle of Marsala amongst fourteen of us! The very plates would soon rise up in judgment against such serving, so our host called out—'Struggles, champagne!' That was all he said; but if you had heard them and been Prime Minister, and the Archbishopric of Dunderhead had been vacant, you would have made the Dean of Dunderhead Archbishop of that ilk on the spot. Thus adjured, Struggles again advanced, holding another bottle. Halfway between the sideboard and the table the bottle gave a faint pop; on went the butler, and leaning over Lord Richborough's chair dribbled a tiny thread of fluid into a tall champagne glass. Now if I have a hatred of anything, next to breaking the commandments, it is of those old-fashioned

tall glasses. The man who invented the round flat sort ought to be buried at the expense of all wine-bibbers under a cairn, piled high with the bottoms of broken champagne bottles. Talk of Dead Sea apples, fairy gold, and ropes of sea-sand! they are realities compared with the drink to be got out of one of these old-fashioned glasses. Drink it up quick indeed! You had better. Swallow down the froth as fast as you can, for when that is over the glass is empty. With those glasses, a bottle of wine is a widow's cruse; there is no knowing how many times it will go round. That bottle, to my certain knowledge, went twice round, and to the last it went on dribbling just as cheerlessly as at first. But let me get on. Next came the inevitable saddle of mutton, and the inseparable fowls and tongue. Both were cold, and badly served. Then there were the usual tasteless new potatoes, infected with the disease while yet babies,—little infants, who would have died of teething in their beds had they not been dug up and eaten. Then there was what the *menu* called a *purée aux épinards*. What a liar's hand it was that scrawled that card, and dared to dignify a mess of sodden spinach by a name which is the *pierre de touche*—the very touchstone of a French cook's knowledge. 'Let him make me a *purée aux épinards*,' said the greediest man in France, when he was

about to engage a new cook. 'If he can make that to my taste, he can do anything.' But there is spinach and spinach. In France the tender blade is taken just as it springs from the soil. Out of this the French *chef* makes his *purée*, fresh and tender as a new-born babe is to cannibal taste. In England, our gardeners wait till the young blade becomes a leaf, a branch, a tree, and only then, when, like a grain of mustard-seed, it has so waxed that the fowls of the air can take shelter under it, is it hewn down and served up as spinach. There were asparagus as bitter as endive, and green peas as big as bullets, any one of which would have brought down its man if fired at him through a breech-loader. There was a salad too. Ye gods! what a salad! This it was in which that white-headed vulture, among men called Struggles, had been wringing his hands when he was not serving us with wine. The sauce was bought at the oilman's, and was rough and rancid. Nevertheless I am a lover of salad, and I ventured on some, though I helped myself with averted eyes. And now I am just going to get my first wholesome mouthful, and, deep in gastronomic expectation, I turn my eyeballs on my plate. At once all hope of appetite is over. What do I see crawling and wriggling about under my nose? A worm—a distinct, unmistakable

red worm, which had lurked among the lettuce, and which, had I been short-sighted, I should have eaten.

Then came a lobster salad and stuffed pigeons. The deanery at Dunderhead must have had a dove-cot. As the lobster salad contained lettuce, I avoided it. It might harbour another worm, and I might have eaten what will one day eat me. I contented myself with pigeons, said to be very heating food. Nay, as my chance of sustenance was now getting small, I even took a whole pigeon, a proceeding which seemed to frighten the waiter at my back, for he puffed and blew like a grampus. But it was all no good. I was not going to be starved by any dean. I kept my pigeon, ate him, and washed him down with a swift draught of water from a tepid carafe. As I did this deed of heroism—for is not London water, according to the faculty, one great cause of cholera?—I turned and looked reproachfully at Struggles, in the vain hope that he would rush forward and serve me at the last moment with a glass of Marsala. It was no good. There he stood bolt upright behind the Dean's chair, with shining forehead and ample white waistcoat, and never a step did he make onward, never a finger did he hold out to save me from martyrdom. Then came, by way of quenching my thirst, toasted cheese, without even

a drop of beer or ale. No, nor even a glass of port wine with it; and that in a dean's house too! Never has my respect for the Church recovered the shock of that day's dinner. There it lies in my memory, buried under a big black stone.

There was the usual dessert. Ices in a profuse state of perspiration, looking as if they had run a long way, and run hard too from Gunter's to save their time. There is nothing so strange and monstrous as a hot ice. It is like a very cool man getting into a rage. It does so surprise you; who would have thought it? And there was ginger, old, and hot, and stringy. And there were strawberries, dusty and deliquescent; old maids with all bloom and rosiness taken off their faces, which had settled down into the hue of red ochre. Figs there were, which must have gone round the world with Captain Cook; and almonds and raisins—the raisins certainly some of Robinson Crusoe's curing. Sweet biscuits there were also, which are an abomination to wine-drinkers. That was all, and more than enough. The wines were Port and Marsala, not a drop else; it was before Gladstonian Burgundy, which fools drink for claret, and wonder why they have such a headache next morning, when they only drank one bottle of that cheap light wine. They little know, as an old French-

man says—‘*Ces vins-là sont très capiteux, et même malsains, quand ils sont neufs.*’

That was the Dean’s dinner, though at the last I must put in a good word for Marsala, which, when good, is a pure wholesome wine, and fathers a deal more sherry than the world wots of.

But was there no conversation? You may well ask. But first you must answer another question: What do you call conversation? Do you call interjections and ejaculations, such as ‘Ah!’ ‘Oh!’ ‘Indeed!’ ‘Very!’ ‘Quite so!’ ‘I shouldn’t wonder,’ ‘Very likely!’ do you call such words, thrown to a dog, conversation? If so, Lord Richborough was a great converser, for he said many things quite as witty as those I have named. Or do you think conversation depends on colloquy or on soliloquy? If the latter, the Member for Dunderhead was a great converser, for he poured out all his morning speech anew, and scarce left the Pope a leg to stand upon. Everything went down before that dull flow of speech, which rose as the tide rises in muddy Thames, and sweeps on full of dead cats, and rats, and dogs, those carcasses representing the abuse against the Jesuits with which the honourable member’s oration was loaded. Or do you call a furious denunciation of modern thought and progress conversation? If so, the Archdeacon, in the intervals of eating, was a great

converser. Those were the days of Blanco White. You never heard of Blanco White? Well, for Blanco White read 'Essays and Reviews,' and suppose he declared it to be 'a very trashy book, written by idiots.' And warming as he went, and perhaps following his own example in preaching sermons, on the principle of selection, he took unto himself an old story from the last century, and said: 'Now, sir, I don't know what you think, but this I say, that these progressive writers are dangerous men. Yes, sir, I repeat it deliberately, 'dangerous;' and I will tell you what the end of it will be with their absurd speculating,—they will rob us of all our beliefs. They have already taken away the belief in a devil, and if they are allowed to go on, they will deny the existence of a God; and the end of it will be that we shall have neither God nor devil, and go out of the world with nothing to make us comfortable on our deathbeds.' If you call that conversation, that was the Archdeacon's notion of it.

The women said little or nothing. The Dean's wife was distracted, like Martha, with the cares of serving. She alone seemed a bar to the wickedness of Struggles, and it was to her disjointed attempts at speech that Lord Richborough was pleased to say the witty sentences we have mentioned. The Archdeacon's wife was partly absorbed in efforts to

set her head-dress straight, and partly lost in admiration of her husband's eloquence. As for the banker's wife, she ought to have sat next to me, but fate tied her to her husband's side, an unsympathising, balance-seeking, cheque-refusing wretch,—I beg leave to say he was not my banker, who was diametrically his opposite,—on whom all his wife's charms were wasted, save the hundred thousand golden reasons that he had for marrying her. After dinner I conversed with her a little, and then fled the Dean's house, with Aunt Mandeville, shaking the dust from off my shoes as I left it, and vowing that nothing should ever induce me to trust our digestion to his cookery for the future.

I should not have remembered the Dean's dinner so minutely had it not been the night on which Aunt Mandeville, whose jealous fit had quite passed off, invited Arethusa and her father to Mandeville Hall on the 31st of August.

After the dinner we went to Lord Pennyroyal's ball. He was a widower, and gave parties where you met good company, and had a very bad supper. Somewhere or other I have a cluster of artificial glass grapes, broken off the top bunch of an *epergne*, or whatever it is called. Below these were real grapes, but above, in the top baskets of the *epergne*, were grapes of glass. It was Arethusa

who found out the false fruit. 'Not those; I want some off the top, up there.'

I thought this very unreasonable, as the grapes below were very good; but I did as I was told, broke off a few grapes, and gave them to her.

'Thank you so much,' she said. 'These were what I wanted. What good wine they would make!' and off she went, holding the sham grapes in her hand till she was tired of holding them, and gave me them to keep.

We four were waiting on the stairs for those carriages, which lagged just as much then as now. It was almost our last night. We were to leave town in two or three days. The Colonel had said something in the usual form about sorrow at parting, when my Aunt replied:

'You and Miss Chichester treated us very badly last winter in not coming to see us as you promised. Will you behave better this year, and come to Mandeville Hall on the 31st of August? we are not going to the sea this summer. We have too much to do at home for that; but if you will come we will do our best to amuse you, and the partridge-shooting is excellent.'

You will remember those were the very words with which my Aunt wound up her invitation to Sir Benjamin Bullion. As my Aunt used them again, I thought of the strange story told by the

unhappy Blogg, and hoped that the Colonel might have as good shooting as the banker, and less luck than Blogg in seeing the ghost. By the way, let me mention that I once met Miss Blogg, the eldest of the tallow-merchant's olive-branches, out at a party, and waltzed with her. She was a nice, natural girl, but waltzed too much as though she were made of cork.

Besides thinking of Blogg, I thought of Arethusa, while my Aunt was speaking, and feared, of course, that the Colonel would say he must go to Aunt Buller's for the 1st of September. It was a great relief, therefore, to hear him say, as I had heard him say a hundred times at least before, 'that nothing would give him greater pleasure.' But let me tell you he said this stock phrase on that occasion, as it seemed to me, in a way that made it quite new. 'Nothing would give him greater pleasure.' What a sweet sentence!

'But will you come?' I whispered to Arethusa. 'I will promise to behave well.'

'I think we shall certainly come,' said Arethusa. 'I know papa would like to see Mandeville Hall again very much. He was often there in your Uncle's time. You know they were great friends.'

Then 'Colonel Chichester's carriage' was shouted out, I verily believe by the same linkman

who still haunts West End parties, and whose importunity seems rather to increase with age. They were huddled into their carriage, drove off, and ours soon followed. That night I slept the sleep of the blessed, and defied all larks, housemaids, and sweeps. But in my dreams I am sure I said, 'Arethusa coming to Mandeville Hall — how delightful !'

CHAPTER IV.

HOW WE WENT BACK TO MANDEVILLE HALL.

I DARESAY all you prudent mothers and aunts who, having no children of your own, take care of those of others, are wondering how it was that Aunt Mandeville, her jealousy once roused by Arethusa, was so very short-sighted as to ask that young lady to Mandeville Hall, and so throw me into the very temptation which she dreaded. The answer is that my Aunt was one of those straightforward persons who very often do most imprudent things. Besides, she was very proud, and never thought that any girl could win my affection from her against her will. She had glared at me once, and almost yelled at me; but as soon as I said, 'there was nothing between us,' she believed what I said. Then her pride came in, and I am sure she paid herself the compliment of supposing that I could never care for any girl more than I did for her. At any rate, she was quite easy on the matter, or she would never have asked the Chichesters to come to us.

Added to this, she had other objects, or more properly another object, in view for me; and there is nothing that blinds your eyes to one object than to have another object ever in view. The object in this case, I am sorry to say, was no other than that I should marry the next estate—that's how I put it—but, of course, I was to marry the heiress to whom that estate belonged. It so happened that this estate 'rounded off' ours, as it was termed. 'Surrounded' would have been a better word, for in parts it so ran into and overlapped our land, that it was hard to tell, unless you were the agent of either property, which was Mandeville and which was Harbury land.

One of the greatest curses of land—one of its heaviest burdens, it seems to me,—is that landowners, especially of fine estates, so often lose themselves in their land. They, in fact, belong to the land, rather than the land to them; and when a man or woman once gets on this quicksand, he speedily sinks his identity in that of his estate. All landowners, good and bad people alike, are exposed to this kind of craze; and I really believe that there is scarce any act of cruelty or harshness towards those who are nearest and dearest to them that persons who suffer from this madness will not inflict, and excuse themselves all the while by saying, 'It is all for the good of the estate.'

As for my Aunt, I firmly believe she had in her purpose predestinated me to marry Mary Harbury as soon as ever I came from the West Indies ; I being then of the mature age of ten, as you know, while Mary was only five. In every thing else I might have free will ; but in this of marriage, my will was to bow to her predestination. The worst was, as often happens, when people have made up their minds to be as the Medes and Persians, that they keep their resolution a close secret, even from the persons most interested in knowing it. It has been settled once for all. No one shall gainsay it. What is the need of talking of it ? This is an axiom to be accepted, not discussed, as that the earth is round,—the sun the centre of our system,—what must be, must be ; ending with, ‘ It’s all for the good of the estate.’

Thus it was that my Aunt, all those years, had kept this alliance, which was to round off our estates and unite the Mandeville and Harbury properties, a profound secret. But now that I was nearly twenty-two, and Mary Harbury sixteen, she began to think it time to consider the feelings of the young people, and to draw them more together. This was one reason why we did not go to the sea that year.

So down we went to Mandeville Hall, and had

it not been for what followed, I should have enjoyed myself through the rest of July and all August in counting the days and waiting for Arethusa. How glad, too, every one was to see us back! The housekeeper was in ecstasies. What stories she told about airing the beds; how the maids had slept in them all round; how they had been put out in the sun; how a shower of rain had very nearly fallen on them, only the whole strength of the household turned out and dragged them indoors. What preserves she had made, and how much more, and how much home-wine besides she should have made, had it not been for those nasty birds that ate up half the crop of small fruit. And then she hoped we were all well, and that Master Edward had got back his health and recovered his reading; and, 'Dear heart! how well Mistress do look.' And so she gabbled on, as though she had spent all the time we were away in taking lessons in elocution from the family parrot.

Next it was the gardener's turn. Never had he known such contrary weather. 'Twas a'most always wet when it should have been dry, and dry when it ought to have been wet. Why red spiders were made he never could tell! All he knew was, they had got into the houses and spoiled half the grapes. As for apples and pears, they'd

be a rare short crop. In all his born days he never see such bloom. Just as if it had snowed on them from the skies; but first one frost took the pears, and a while after another took the apples, and cut them off as it were with a knife. Walnuts? Well, there'd be about enough for pickling, but never a nut more to crack. So he went on with his litany, and had we believed him, we should have gone to bed with the unpleasant feeling that there would be neither great nor small fruit that year at Mandeville Hall; but we knew our man—a second Andrew Fairservice—and did not believe him; and after all we had very good fruit that autumn.

As the Chichesters were coming for the 1st of September, I was more anxious about the game, and was glad to find the head gamekeeper in a more cheerful mood. 'Yes, there would be lots of partridges and hares; there always had been, and he hoped always would be as long as he lived at Mandeville Hall. Indeed there were a-nigh too many hares; and when we began shooting we must mind and give some ground game away to the farmers, else they'd be coming up to the Hall and telling my lady "that them hares wouldn't leave a blade of corn on the estate."' What about the pheasants? 'Yes, there'd be a good few of them too. The breeding time had been good; the

scent had been so good last hunting season that the foxes had a hard time of it. There were not nearly so many litters of cubs as he had often known, and so there were more pheasants.' You must bear in mind that those were not the days of egg-stealing and hen-hatching. The hen pheasants, with few exceptions, were expected to do their own sitting and hatching; and so I suppose they were better mothers. Perhaps there were fewer foxes. Who can tell? But, at any rate, there were many more wild broods, and much less tame hatching, than we have now-a-days.

In a few days after we had made ourselves at home again, during which time I have no doubt Brooks had been great on London and its comforts and discomforts in the servants' hall, supported in all he said by his faithful and ancient ally, Mr. Ribbons, the coachman. After a few days, I say, I began to perceive that my Aunt had something on her mind, and that it related to me. I was so lost in my day-dreams about Arethusa—so busy in casting up and then obliterating in my mental calendar each day that was passing between our meeting—that I was slow to take the hints which my Aunt let fall.

'Don't you think, Edward, we might drive over to Harbury, and call on Mrs. Harbury?'

‘Yes, I thought we might, some day; but that day I was engaged to ride over to Leamington, on business.’

‘But you might do both. It’s not so far round to Harbury, by Leamington. Why not start early, do your business in Leamington, and then go on to Harbury to luncheon?’

So I had to go; but I am ashamed to say that I dawdled so long in Leamington, having my hair cut, buying fishing-tackle, and talking to a horse-dealer, that I got to Harbury just too late to catch the Harburys, who went out every day for a drive at three o’clock as regularly as if their veins had been filled with clockwork instead of blood.

I must tell you that I felt innocent enough till I returned from this ride, and was not in the least conscious of guilt in not catching the Harburys. In my frame of mind any young lady, except Arethusa, was a bore, and to be shunned accordingly; but I was not in the least aware that my Aunt had set her heart on my seeing them, till she said:

‘Very provoking, I must say, that you lingered so long in Leamington; you must have lost an hour and a half, at least, there. You surely might have had your hair cut, and bought your tackle, and settled your affairs with Mr. Horseball, in

half-an-hour, and then you would not have missed the Harburys.'

'But, Auntie,' I said, very innocently, 'what harm is there in missing them?'

'They are our nearest neighbours, except the Grubbs, and them I hardly call neighbours,' said my Aunt. 'The estates join, and Mary Harbury is a very nice girl; I should like you to see more of her.'

That was all Auntie said then, but she had nearly couched me of that cataract of love which blinded me to anything or any one except Arethusa. The scales seemed to fall from my eyes, and I began to suspect my Aunt and to loathe Mary Harbury. How many vows of eternal constancy I offered up that night to the fountain of Arethusa I am afraid to count.

Next day I was still more alarmed.

'I dare say the Harburys will be glad to hear something of our London season; I will write and ask them to come and dine quietly with us the day after to-morrow.'

To say was to do with Aunt Mandeville, and so the note was sent that very afternoon by a groom, who was to bring back an answer; and when the answer came, in the shape of a three-cornered note, it said, 'They would be very happy.'

“Very happy!” Indeed, I remember repeating indignantly to myself; ‘and I suppose I am expected to be very happy, too; we shall see!’ and then came another torrent of vows to Arethusa.

When the day after to-morrow came, my Aunt was a little less placid than usual, and said that she had also asked our rector, Mr. St. Faith, and Major Plunger, from Leamington, a heavy cavalry officer.

‘The rector will take me in to dinner, Edward, and Major Plunger Mrs. Harbury, and you must take in Mary Harbury, and mind you make yourself very pleasant to her. I think her a very nice girl.’

Had I ever said she was not a nice girl? Why did my Aunt go out of her way to impress the fact on me? I began to be terribly afraid of my Aunt’s intentions.

People used to dine at seven in those days; and so, at ten minutes to that hour, wheels were heard rolling up the avenue; but before any one could arrive who had come on wheels, in glided our rector, Mr. St. Faith, to whom I now beg leave to introduce you. Mr. St. Faith was a B.D., and what used to be called a sound divine. He was neither high nor low. He was not a broad churchman, though that was a term then unknown. He certainly was not a deep one. He was neither

progressive nor retrograde. He abhorred heresy in all its shapes, avoided the rock of innovation, detested Rome and Geneva alike; and if he had any dogma, it was that the Archbishop of Canterbury was supreme within these realms in matters of faith, but only so far as the sovereign would suffer him to be so; in a word, he was quite content with the Church of England, and with his particular position in it; and being vexed with no doubts and difficulties, he was perfectly free, and had full time to discharge the duties of his office. 'There was so much,' he used to say, 'to be said on both sides, that he was on neither side, but remained in the middle.' In fact, he was just what the framers of the formularies of the Church of England meant clergymen to be, and was a living proof that a man may hold heartily most contradictory opinions, and yet discharge his duty conscientiously. As for the Thirty-nine Articles, he had learnt them by heart, been examined in them, answered the questions put to him to the satisfaction of the examiners, signed them, and sworn to them several times, and then forgotten them all, except so far as to say, 'I believe in the thirty-nine articles, and what they say I say.' His form was like his faith—sleek, round, and comfortable. He was not at all thin, and yet no one could call him fat. The top of his head was bald,

just in a round like a priest's tonsure, and in Elizabeth's time he would have been imprisoned, and perhaps burnt at the stake as a seminary priest, on the mere evidence of his scalp. He was of middle height, with a round, cheerful face, and bright, broad forehead, beneath which twinkled two grey eyes—small they were, but, though small, they were gems of the purest water, and shone far more brilliantly than those great fishy saucer-eyes which some folk have. I never knew any one more scrupulously neat in his dress. His linen was always snowy-white; and there was a story that once, having lost his portmanteau, with all his stock of clothes, for three days, he was forced to wear the same shirt for that space of time, and yet it was whiter at the end of the third day than the shirt of any other man would have been after one day's wear. He was, in fact, of that easy, even temper, that his clothes never wore out, nor was his linen soiled; no dust or dirt could cling to him.

I need hardly say he was Aunt Mandeville's right-hand man. He knew the face of every man, woman, and child for miles round; and if there was any drainage to be done at a cottage, or if a fever broke out, there was good parson St. Faith sure to be found laying down the levels, or preaching to the people about the duty of cleanliness and decent living, quite as vigorously as he incul-

cated religion and morality every Sunday from the pulpit.

That was our parson, who had walked from the Rectory; but I could fill a volume singing his praises, so I pass on to the next of the wheel-borne guests, who are just entering the hall in a body.

First came Mrs. Harbury. How shall I describe her? She was what is called a good woman—and then people stopped short as much as to take breath before telling you in what her goodness consisted. I can only repeat that she was a very good woman, but a very unwise one. She was so virtuous and so uncompromising that people fled from her virtue to vice as a relief; it was very wicked of them, but so it was, and she was as much to blame as a pretender to music who plays a sonata of Beethoven at sight, and frightens all the company out of the room. If this be Beethoven we will not listen to him. Mrs. Harbury ought have been described as a woman with the best intentions and the worst results. Her lecturing on very venial sins had frightened half-a-dozen, and perhaps many more, village maidens away from Harbury up to London, in order that they might escape the rancour of ‘Madam’ Harbury’s tongue.

‘Susan couldn’t a-bear Madame Harbury’s scolding for falling asleep one Sunday afternoon in

the summer, and so she went up to see a cousin in London and was lost.'

Thin-blooded herself, well to do, and beyond the reach of any temptation, she had no charity, and the pleasure of her life was to make existence as uncomfortable as she could to others. No one had ever heard of Old Harbury,—at least, no one ever spoke of him,—but if when he was alive he ever committed any sin, however slight, and it came to Madame Harbury's ears, all I can ejaculate is,—'Heaven help Old Harbury!'

This rigid Christian had a daughter, the Mary Harbury of whom you have heard. Now, I am not about to speak ill of Mary Harbury. My Aunt was quite right; she *was* a very nice girl; lively, good-looking, sweet-tempered, and amusing. For an heiress, she was rather attractive. But then I hate heiresses. No, I don't hate, I pity them; the greater the heiress, the more I pity her. Like great diamonds, their value increases so rapidly with the size of their property that at last no one can afford to buy them, and they remain to be stared at, not to be owned.

What man of any self-respect can marry a great heiress, even with the best of tempers; but suppose her not to be good-tempered, and to be given to throwing her money in her husband's teeth, till she gets to—'My money, Sir!' or, 'My

money, Mr. Dolt !' How can that man's home fail to be a hell upon earth? No doubt, as there are exceptions to every rule, there are exceptions to this ; and as it is possible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, so it may be possible for a man to marry a great heiress and be happy ; but all things considered, were I bound to belong in some way to a great heiress, I think I would sooner be her child—provided he were a healthy one—than her husband.

Such were the reflections with which I looked on the really nice Mary Harbury, as she entered the Hall under the virtuous wing of her too moral mother. What were they like? Yes ! I had forgotten. Mrs. Harbury was tall and spare,—gaunt and gawky, some people would have said. She had something of the look of a nun escaped from a convent where she had been starved, and whipped, and chained, and then broken loose. There was an air of moral maceration about her, which showed how a really fine form and face had been worn down and effaced by the lack of that great and perfect gift of charity, which gives a polish to all our actions, and is woman's best cosmetic. No doubt its genial and kindly influence makes us really beautiful both in body and soul. As it was, Mrs. Harbury was red-nosed, sharp-visaged, and defiant; the tips of her fingers felt as cold as that charity

of which she stood so much in need, and when you shook hands with her, a thrill passed from her which went straight to the marrow of your bones, and made your skin creep. It would have taken at least a ton of coals to restore Madam Harbury's circulation, and when she put her feet into a warm bath, the water froze. Altogether, she was a pleasant woman to have for a mother-in-law.

Well! but Mary Harbury? Don't be impatient; here you have her. Mary Harbury was tall,—taller decidedly than Arethusa. She was dark, but not very dark; her eyes were brown, but, bless you! they were no eyes at all compared to Aunt Mandeville's brown eyes. Her face was oval; she had good lips, though the upper lip was rather thin, as though her mother had made it all herself, without the help of any one. Her teeth were white, and she had a very pretty smile. She had a good figure, but it had not that lissom, snakelike look that Arethusa's back had, that caught you in its coils long before you saw her face; and when you saw Arethusa's face, you were beyond all hope. No! Mary Harbury's back and waist were a back and waist and nothing more; and her face was a face, and her smile a smile, and nothing more; but Arethusa's eyes were blue and deep as her own fountain; her hair was a net, out of the meshes of which no mortal man

once snared could escape. In a word, what could I say more of Arethusa Chichester or of Mary Harbury? and how shall I compare them except by saying that I was madly in love with Arethusa and did not care one bit for Mary Harbury?

There only remains Major Plunger to describe. The Major was a most unfortunate man, in that he lived in those unwarlike days. The 105th Prince Regent's Own Dragoon Guards, the distinguished regiment to which he belonged, had not been out of England since Waterloo; in fact, it was one of those pieces of cavalry furniture which are too heavy to send out of England for military service except on very extraordinary occasions. The Major was a brave man, as brave as a lion if he had been where lions ought to be—abroad in the desert; but at home he was as heavy as a bullock. Poor fellow! he lived before his time. The Balaclava charge would have been the place for him, and he would have blundered through it with the rest of those gallant fellows, and either been killed or have escaped to find himself famous. But there he was in the year 183—, heavy and inglorious. Having entered the army in the year after the battle of Waterloo, and spent his time since between Peterloo and Parsonstown, now in Eng-

land in the manufacturing districts, now in Ireland suppressing party processions.

But it is time we had dinner, and in due time Brooks appeared and announced it, and we all went off with our allotted partners to the dining-room. Don't be afraid, I am not going to bore you with the details of another dinner. Our dinners were as unlike the Dean's dinner as could be. They were like the whales and the creeping things in the first chapter of Genesis. You have forgotten what they were like? Just turn to the chapter then, and you will see that they were 'very good;' and so were Aunt Mandeville's dinners.

What did we talk about? All sorts of things. Mr. St. Faith talked to my Aunt about Becky Martin's case, and how she would have to go to the county hospital if she were ever to be cured of her lameness,—the said Becky Martin having fallen down and broken her leg, which had been set all awry by Dr. Mindererus's assistant. Major Plunger talked? No! he did not talk; he answered when he was questioned; that is to say if he had anything to answer. If not, he said 'Oh!' 'Just so,' or downright 'I don't know.' On this occasion Madam Harbury plied him with dogmatic questions, and even got so far as to ask him what he thought of Original Sin. When the unhappy Major said that he scarce knew what original

sin was, Madame Harbury was greatly shocked, and repeated the Article beginning, 'Original or birth sin lieth not in the following of Adam as the Pelagians do vainly fable,' &c., much to the admiration of Mr. St. Faith, who innocently whispered to me, 'I couldn't have repeated that Article,—no, not for a hundred pounds.' But the poor Major got still more into the mire by blurting out, 'Well! Mrs. Harbury, I think one has quite enough trouble with the sins one commits every day without bothering oneself about those which Adam and Eve may have committed.' An opinion for which he ought to have been made full Colonel on the spot in the Church Militant, but which, alas! only drew down on him a series of questions on the creeds and catechisms, which must have made him sigh for a cool cannonade in exchange for the rasping religion of Madam Harbury.

What did I talk about to Mary Harbury? We all know that the heart of man is desperately wicked and deceitful above the weights, and so it was with my heart that night. I knew that my Aunt wished me to be agreeable to Mary Harbury, and so I was wicked enough to throw dirt in Auntie's eyes. Mary Harbury, on her side, seemed quite flattered, and, as I rattled on about London and its pleasures, asked questions, till her brown eyes shone with something of the Mande-

ville lustre. I could see—nay, I could feel, that my Aunt was greatly pleased, and even before the guests were out of the house, she had told me, with one of her sweetest smiles :

‘You behaved very well at dinner, Edward. How nice it would be to round off the Mandeville and Harbury estates in a ring-fence!’

‘A ring-fence!’ Yes! That was just it! A wedding-ring fence. Something that would cabin and confine me all my days, and keep me away from my darling, fast-bound in misery and matrimony. So, with a smile on my face and a frown at my heart, I went to bed, renewing my vows to Arethusa, and defying my Aunt Mandeville and all her works to wed me to Mary Harbury.

CHAPTER V.

HOW AUGUST PASSED AT MANDEVILLE HALL.

NEXT morning things got worse and worse. My Aunt was full of the Harburys. She thought Mary such a nice girl: so lively, and so full of animation.

‘Do you know I like her a deal better than Arethusa Chichester—don’t you, Edward?’

Here was a home-thrust.

‘Why, Auntie, I know Miss Chichester very well, and Miss Harbury very little, so I don’t see how I can be expected to like the one I know least of better than the one of whom I know most.’

I thought this answer most dextrous and diplomatic, and it put my Aunt off till after luncheon; but in the afternoon she returned to the charge, and while we were out for a drive, she said outright, she would be so glad if I married Miss Harbury.

This was really too much; but Aunt Mandeville’s eagerness left me a loophole to creep out.

‘They’ll think we wish to jump down their throats, Auntie, if I say anything about it. Mary Harbury is only just out of the nursery—barely seventeen, if so much. She cannot know her own mind; and I, too, have as yet seen little or nothing of life. I think I had better wait a while before I ask any one to marry me.’

This very diplomatic speech made my Aunt draw in her horns. She saw there was sense in what I said, and dropped the subject, only repeating:

‘How I should like to round off the Mandeville and Harbury properties in a ring-fence.’

Poor Auntie! there she was ready to sacrifice my young heart to her grand idea. For the sake of rounding off the estate she counted my will and my affections as dust. This is the kind of tyranny that makes freemen of us all, and emancipates us even from our parents. From that very day, much as I loved Aunt Mandeville, I hardened my heart against her matrimonial schemes, and inwardly swore I would not have my young heart sold in the marriage-market.

The best of it was that, up to that summer, Aunt Mandeville had rather kept aloof from the Harburys. She was about as antipathetic as it was possible to be to Madam Harbury. I don’t believe the two women had a thought or a feeling

in common; nor did my Aunt even know what her neighbour's feelings would be as to the match. For all we knew she might have made up her mind to marry her daughter to some Dissenting minister, all for the sake of setting an example of humility and godliness. But for all that, Aunt Mandeville, in her obstinate heart of hearts, was bent on the match, and resolved to bring it about if possible. She was not the woman to give up her intentions, once formed; least of all, one so eminently calculated to increase the welfare of the estate. As for me, her nephew Edward Halfacre—why, I belonged to the estate just as she belonged to it; and for the good of it, I was not to have any will of my own.

I ought to have told you that when the ladies left the room after dinner, and we men remained behind, Major Plunger, relieved from the incubus of Madam Harbury, and feeling less like a charity boy called on to give an account of his belief, refreshed himself with several glasses of the old Mandeville port, and began to talk in a more natural way. He told us of the regiment, and how the men, old soldiers and recruits alike, would drink so. 'Beef and beer,' he said, 'made them so heavy that it was very difficult to get horses up to their weight.' The Colonel was at his wits' end, and the worst was, the 'figure,' as he called it, of

weight-bearing horses rose rapidly. 'It isn't only the home demand,' he went on. 'Those foreigners'—here he added some expletives, complimentary neither to the eyes nor limbs of the said foreigners—'Those foreigners now look to the English market for their remounts, and show their faces at every English horse-fair. Here at Leamington we have got a Prussian military agent, a Captain in what they call their Horse Guards, who buys up all the likely animals from the breeders and farmers, even before they come to the fairs, and completely forestalls us. He goes out hunting, too, and is good friends with every one. The Colonel one day at mess last winter said "he didn't mean to say anything unkind or ungentlemanlike, but if any of our cornets could only ride over the Count and break his neck—why, horses would be cheaper next Coventry fair!"'

Mr. St. Faith rather champed and chewed at this speech of Major Plunger's, which, of course, he thought very un-Christian; but he sat it out, while I listened in wonder to hear so long an oration from the Major; then, wishing to turn the conversation, and to say something, Mr. St. Faith vaguely asked, 'By the way, what is this Prussian officer's name?'

'That I'm sure I can't say,' said Major

Plunger; 'at least, I can't pronounce it at all. I've heard it over and over again, but it always escapes me, and I have never got my tongue over it. It begins easy and ends hard, that's all I know.'

'Very like sin, Edward,' said Mr. St. Faith. 'That always begins easy and ends hard. I wonder, though, what the name is. What is the easy beginning, Major?'

'Man,' said the Major, 'and then it goes on into *toif*-something, but what *toif*-something is, I'm sure I can't say. The worst is with these nasty foreign names, they never look the same when they are written as they sound when they are spoken; so no one can make them out, even on paper. All I can say is, there is no *toif* in this fellow's name on paper, but *teuf*. Now if a man will have his name written *teuf*, and pronounce it *toif*, how can he expect to have it understood?'

'Very true, Major,' went on the Rector, in his soft, easy way. 'It is very wrong in the foreigners to have such hard names. I wonder what they have to say to such easy English names as "Cholmondeley," and "Cirencester;" and down here in Warwickshire to some of our local names. This very Major, riding home from Coventry to Leamington, might be told to keep to the left after

"Stychall" toll-gate; but when he came to the gate, and found it written up "Stivichale," he might think he had gone wrong. Don't you think English names are just as hard to foreigners as foreign names to Englishmen? Six to one side, and half-a-dozen to the other.'

'I don't know anything about it,' said the Major, doggedly, whose inner man was now strengthened by half a bottle of port; 'but I only wish these foreigners, with their jaw-breaking names, wouldn't come here buying up our horses, and making us lose our front teeth in trying to speak to them.'

Mr. St. Faith made no reply, and as it was now clear that the Major had spirit enough in him to have attempted to answer that awful question in the Catechism, beginning, 'My good child, know this,' should Madam Harbury put it to him, we left our wine and sought the ladies.

I am sure I ought to apologise for bringing in this conversation all out of its place, but I really was so full of telling you about my Aunt and her schemes for settling me for life in a ring-fence, that I forgot till now this very edifying bit of after-dinner conversation.

How did the month of August go? Very slowly. How I grudged it its odd day! Why had it thirty-one days? But thirty-one days it

had, and there was no help for it. Did I ever tell you I was of a poetical turn? I fancy most of us are poetical when we are young and in love. We are prosaic enough in after-life, but love warms us up and makes us 'numerous.' I see already that you do not understand what I mean by 'numerous.' I don't think, if you are an ordinary reader, you have any notion of what I mean. You must be quite puzzled. You, worthy Mr. Commonplace, when Mrs. C., the wife of your bosom, who has talked prose and read poetry to you for forty years, comes to this passage, of course will cry out, 'Numerous! how can love make a man "numerous?" how can any man be "numerous," my dear? It must be a misprint—they print novels so badly now-a-days—for "humorous." Even then I don't see the sense, I always thought that love made a man melancholy and dull; that it was no joke, in fact. I know well what I felt, Anna Maria, when I thought old Deputy Baggs, who was worth a plum, was to be what is termed "your favoured suitor." Did I feel "humorous?" No, I felt murderous!'

With all deference to Mr. Commonplace, who, in his way, is I daresay as good a judge of tallow and bristles as Mr. Blogg, I say that 'numerous' is no misprint. I say that true love does make us 'numerous,'—the blind boy 'lisps in numbers.'

Do you see my meaning now, Mr. Commonplace? What do you understand by 'numbers?' Don't answer 'arithmetic,' and conjure up the fearful image of Cupid, slate-pencil in hand, doing a sum in double rule of three. Pigs of lead, for instance, a sum just suited to your capacity, Mr. Commonplace. No, 'numbers,' mean verse and metre, and 'numerous verse' means not a quantity of verses, but lines written with rhythm, rhyme, and metre, as it may be. How strange it is that the most unbridled feeling of our nature, the passion which mocks at all restraint, and laughs at bonds and locksmiths, should be just that which rushes into verse, and pours out its feelings in measured music. Well! however strange it may be, love makes a man do many strange things; and it made me write verse while I was waiting for Arethusa. Nay, I wrote a whole poem, called Helen of Troy. It was no imitation of Goethe's great revival of that fair woman; for it was before I read 'Faust.' Don't be afraid, I am not going to give you any of it. It has long since been confided to those faithful flames which keep so many secrets. I cannot remember a line of it; and now, if I give you a specimen or two of my poetical powers, it is only to show you what a tyrant love is, and how he throws some poetic fury

into the dulllest brains. Here is something that begins innocently enough :

A DIRGE.

- ‘ Spring-time coming, bees’ sweet humming,
Woods and fields are loud with life ;
Wild flowers springing, wood-birds singing,
Love’s first whisper, love’s first strife.
- ‘ Summer glowing, true love knowing
All that heart can care to know ;
Past the morning, but still scorning
Fear, whatever wind may blow.
- ‘ Autumn failing, women wailing,
As her loves drop dead like leaves ;
Swallows flitting, not one sitting
Underneath the cottage eaves.
- ‘ Winter snowing, north wind blowing,
Weaving white earth’s winding sheet,
Lovers once now palsy-stricken,
Theirs the pulse no joy can quicken,
Deaf, and blind, and mute they meet.
- ‘ Then take the spring while it is spring,
Live warm in summer while it glows,
Nor wait till winter comes as king,
With crown of thorns that bear no rose.’

Whether it ends so innocently is another matter ;
but such as it is, there it is, to show you that my

love for Arethusa, bright and pure though it was, often filled me with melancholy forebodings.

What else did I do?

I walked about the park, and fished in the river when there were fishing-days; yes, and caught many a lusty trout, too, with the tackle which I had bought the day I contrived to miss the Harburys. The Avon ran through our park, and under the hill. The brook from Kenilworth fell into it, then bright and clear, and full of fish; now they are both black and vile with Coventry and Kenilworth filth, and as fishless as the Dead Sea. Then, too, I looked after the pheasants, and walked over the fields and through the coverts with the gamekeeper, and counted the broods and coveys, and gloated over the good sport Colonel Chichester would have when he came to Mandeville Hall with Arethusa. Once or twice, too, for very idleness, I rode over to Leamington to see the Heavies, and had luncheon with Major Plunger. One day I remember we went over—the Major and I—to Warwick, to the old curiosity shop, and I bought a set of silver beads, which I meant to give to Arethusa. You shall hear all about them very soon. After we had bought the beads, which were very dear, though about a quarter the price they would have cost in these modern ruination days, we were sauntering along the High

Street, when I saw a tall man coming up to us. The Major had barely time to say, 'Here's that Man-toif, or Toif-man,' before he was face to face with us. Major Plunger was rather a shy man, particularly with strangers and foreigners; but something had to be done, and so he said with great presence of mind for him, 'How do you do, Count?'—wisely excluding the *Toif*,—'allow me to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Halfacre.'

'Charmed to make his acquaintance,' said the Count, in excellent English. 'Just joined, I suppose? Have you got a good charger?'

'Mr. Halfacre is not one of us,' said the Major, 'nor is he in the army at all.'

'What a pity!' said the Count, pronouncing the word rather like 'peety.' 'He would make a fine heavy cavalry officer.'

'Did you do anything at Coventry fair?' said the Major, returning to the ever-important question of the remounts. 'They say good horses will be dearer than ever. By the way, Count, don't they breed horses in Germany, that they must send you over here to buy up ours?'

'Oh, yes,' said the Count; 'we have many horses, only not so good as yours; and then we have more cavalry regiments, and stronger than yours, so we want all our own horses, and yours besides.'

‘Why can’t you get them from Roossia?’ said the Major. ‘I always thought the Roossians and Proossians went hand in hand, and helped one another.’

‘Well,’ said the Count, ‘we have a Holy Alliance, and are bound to help one another in time of war; but in time of peace the export of horses from Russia is strictly prohibited, and so we are forced to come here.’

How long the Major might have gone on growling about the Roossians and Proossians, and their raising the price of horseflesh, no one can tell; but the Count was in a hurry to get away, feeling, no doubt, bored by the turn the conversation was taking, so he raised his hat, and with a profound salutation to both of us, off he went.

He was a fine, tall man, well set up after the true Prussian military type; fair, with cold, light-blue eyes, and a lemon-coloured beard and moustache; about thirty, I should say. Dear me! in those days I looked on a man of thirty as rather old.

‘What a bore not to know a fellow’s name, and if you hear it, not to be able to pronounce it,’ said the Major. ‘I really must find it out.’

On we went up the street to the ‘Bear and Ragged Staff,’ the well-known inn in Warwick, and there we overtook the Count, and found out

why he was in such a hurry. He had only just time to go into the 'Bear' and pay his bill before the *Tallyho* started for Birmingham, whither he was going on one of his horse-buying expeditions.

'Here is his portmanteau,' said the Major, with a curiosity which would have done credit to a female spy; 'and now we will read his name, and try to pronounce it. I won't go about any longer meeting a fellow and not knowing his name.'

As he said this he went up to the portmanteau, which was labelled in large letters:

'GRAF MANTEUFFEL,
PRUSSIAN LEGATION,
LONDON.'

'Here it is, just as I told you. What Graf may be I'm sure I can't tell; some horrid Christian name, I suppose, the short for "Giraffe," I daresay. He just looks like one—long, and lean and yellow; but here is Man: MAN, Man; TEUF, teuf—not *toif*, mind you, FEL, fel. What does all that make—Man-teuf-fel? Manteuffel; not a trace of *toif* in it. Here he comes, bill in hand; now listen to me.'

'My dear Count Manteuffel, you'll be late for the coach if you don't take care.'

It was evident by the puzzled look of the Count that the Major's pronunciation of his name was at least strange, for he hesitated a little, then smiled graciously, and said :

‘ My dear Major, you have not yet got it quite just. My name is Mantoiffel, not Manteuffel.’

‘ Then why the devil don't you spell it Mantoiffel ?’ said the Major ; ‘ and what, I should like to know, does “ Graf ” mean ?’

‘ That, my dear friend,’ replied the Count, ‘ is something which you do not possess, though, no doubt, your valour, so often shown in the battle-field, proves that you richly merit it. “ Graf ” is only a title—the German for Count, in fact,—and as I am called Count in England or France, I am called “ Graf ” at home in Germany. Both words mean the same thing.’

And so, having crushed Major Plunger, the Count climbed up to the box seat, and rattled down the street on the top of the *Tallyho*.

‘ Thinks himself very clever, no doubt,’ said Major Plunger ; ‘ but why a man can call himself Teuf, if his name is really Toif, I can't at all see.’

Young as I was, I could quite see that the Major had got the worst of it. He had shown bad manners and lost his temper, while the Count had rapped him over the knuckles without losing his temper or showing the slightest incivility.

Still the Major went back to Leamington rather elated. Had he not forced Count Manteuffel to pronounce his own name?

As for me, I went back to Mandeville Hall well pleased that another day was gone; I also resolved to get Auntie to ask Count Manteuffel once when the Chichesters came. 'Then the Colonel,' I said to myself, 'will have some one to talk to out shooting, and I shall be left alone to think of Arethusa.'

Now, the fifteenth of August came, and with it a letter from Arethusa to my Aunt. I remember the thrill it gave me to see her handwriting among the letters which lay on the breakfast-table, waiting for my Aunt. How I longed for her appearance! She was fully two minutes late, and those dear, short, family prayers, how long they seemed! And the cook, how fat she looked, waddling out of the room; and Brooks,—brute, that he was! to stay behind to gossip with Aunt Mandeville and hinder her from reading her letters!

I watched her over my cup; and I remember thinking she will, of course, read Arethusa's letter first of all. But Auntie did nothing of the kind. The first letter was from our old friend Sir Benjamin Bullion about an investment in consols.

'Very kind of him to take so much trouble, and to write himself.'

Then she read a charitable application. 'Ano-

ther clergyman, with fifty pounds a-year, and ten children. Why do poverty and progeny always go together, like twins? What lady of good family and means ever had three children at a birth, and claimed the king's bounty? But the wife of the Rev. Felix Rabbits has had seven children in four years, and they are all doing well and thriving, in spite of the starvation in which they have always lived.' Such reflections as these did my Aunt pour out over the appeal of the Rev. Felix Rabbits, ending with: 'Well, poor creatures, I suppose I must send them five pound.'

'And here, I declare, is a letter from Miss Chichester. I wonder what she says, Edward? Perhaps it is to say that they can't come on the 31st.'

It was lucky for me that Aunt Mandeville did not look at me as she said this, else she would have seen my face as woe-begone as that of the White Lady.

It was not a long letter, and, as soon as she had read it, Auntie threw it over to me, with something like a mild reproach in her 'You may as well read it, Edward; they are more your friends than mine!'

This was what the letter said. As it was not marked private I lay it before you, most inquisitive public.

‘BULLER HALL, SOUTH MOLTON,

‘August 12th.

‘DEAR MRS. MANDEVILLE,

‘My father bids me write and say that, if you still wish us to come to you on the 31st, we shall be most happy to do so. I hope we shall have better weather in Warwickshire than we have had in Devon. It has poured incessantly since we came, and one dry day would be a great relief. Will you please write me a line, to say if you expect us on the 31st? With my father’s kind regards,

‘Believe me,

‘My dear Mrs. Mandeville,

‘Very sincerely yours,

‘ARETHUSA CHICHESTER.’

‘A very proper letter,’ said my Aunt, gazing at me; ‘very business-like and to the purpose. Of course I shall write and say that we expect them. I hope they will stay out the month.’

Lest a visit for a month in these degenerate days of three-days’ and five-days’ visits should alarm you, let me tell you that visits were much longer in those days, and of course much pleasanter if the company were pleasant, and the reverse if they were the reverse. There is a story

of those days of long visits, that a well-known bore, staying on a long visit in a country house, cleared it out in a fortnight, and at last was left alone in it with his hosts and one other man, who, in stepping out of a window to escape the conversation of this very bore, fell down several feet, and broke his leg. When they picked him up, he said, 'Thank God! anything rather than an hour's talk with Mr. McTeazer.' The same Mr. McTeazer at last took to solitary walks, and one day he took the pet retriever of the family with him. When he came home, he said, 'A most extraordinary thing happened to me to-day. I took Rover out with me for a walk, and just as we had gone a little way, I began to speak kindly to him, when he looked up in my face, howled piteously, and ran away home.'

Even the dumb animals at last found him out, and fled from him—the bore of bores.

But to return. Even in those days of long visits, Aunt Mandeville's hatred of short visits was remarkable. 'What,' she used to say, 'is the good of people packing up, and taking the trouble to leave home for a few days? As soon as you begin to like them they are gone, and it's the same story with the next lot. No! don't ask people to stay with you at all if you don't like them well enough to wish them to stay long. I wish no one to come

to Mandeville Hall who will not stay there a month.'

These were sad, old-fogy notions, and would never pass current now-a-days; but so long as Aunt Mandeville lived, that was the law at Mandeville Hall, and it was a law that sat lightly on most people, for it was very pleasant living at Mandeville Hall.

I was so overjoyed to think that the Chichesters were really coming, that I said nothing at all except:

'Very good of you, Auntie, to ask them for so long a time; I hope we shall be able to amuse them while they are here.'

'Of course we shall, Edward. I like Colonel Chichester. Indeed, they are both very pleasant. We will ask Mary Harbury over to spend a week, and then you will be able to see how much better bred she is than Miss Chichester. So that with her, and Mr. St. Faith, and Major Plunger, and the other officers from Leamington, and that 'Man Toif,' of whom you told me the other day, and who seems to be clever, we shall do very well.'

That very afternoon my Aunt wrote off to Miss Chichester, saying that she would never forgive the Colonel if he broke his promise to bring her to Mandeville Hall on the 31st of August; so the question of their coming was as

good as settled. As for me, as I thought it would please my Aunt, who was playing my game so well for me, I rode over to Harbury and had a long discussion with Madam Harbury on the future state of those good men of old times who were left to the uncovenanted mercies of God; about which she confessed that she had great doubts, while I maintained that I believed the patriarchs and old heathens might expect to be very comfortable hereafter, provided they had lived up to their lights while on earth.

As for Mary Harbury, she was working a sampler, on which all the virtues were inculcated, as a pattern for one of the school children. Having done my duty, I rode home, dined in charity with all men, and went to bed—not, I am ashamed to say, to dream of the condition of the ancient patriarchs and philosophers, but to fancy that I was again seated under that beech at Chiswick, with Arethusa by my side.

Why should I go on counting the days? The sun rose and the sun set; the morning and the evening made up day by day; and at last it was the 31st, and that afternoon Arethusa was to arrive.

Of course it was a fine day. There was not a breath of air, and all the park was covered with a golden haze. The hares clung to their forms till you kicked them up. The partridges took

dust baths on the roads and wherever there was dust, quite unconscious of their fate on the morrow. The pheasants, young and old, cock and hen, strutted in and out of the coverts, as though they well knew that they had still a month's law. The very wood-pigeons were less shy and wary than usual, and I came within shot of several. Everything seemed to hold its breath till my Arethusa came.

They were to make their way across country, by Bath and Birmingham, and we were to send to meet them to Warwick. I had gone out under pretence of seeing the keeper about the guns and dogs for the morrow, but really to conceal my emotion while expecting Arethusa. I would not have sat alone with Auntie in the hall for anything. I had got half way down the avenue, about half a mile from the Hall, when I heard the sound of wheels a long way off. Quick as thought I turned and ran towards the house in all that airless summer heat, and only got back just in time. Had the old coachman been hard on the horses, I should have been late; but, by being hard on myself, I reached the hall-door two minutes before them, and was ready to receive Arethusa as she alighted.

Dear me! how beautiful she looked, and how well her figure showed as she tripped up the stone

steps. One step brought her into the old hall, followed by her father and myself; and there, with the White Lady looking down on us with her face of unutterable woe, we four stood under the roof of Mandeville Hall.

My Aunt was profuse in her inquiries. 'How far had they come that day?' 'Only from Birmingham.' 'That was twenty miles at least, and even to start from such a smoky place was very fatiguing.' 'Had they waited long for the carriage?' 'No, only just time enough to have luncheon.' That was before the days of five-o'clock tea for all the world; but Arethusa and Aunt Mandeville had some, while I took the Colonel a walk to revive his recollection of the park. At seven we dined quietly, four of us together, and before we sat down I thought it was going to be the nicest dinner in every way. It was all one course, and one dish — Arethusa, and Arethusa, and Arethusa.

How did she meet me? Very sweetly and softly indeed. One glance of recognition from those deep blue eyes; one hearty grasp of the outstretched hand; one thrill that passed through both frames. That was all, and it was enough.

'I am so glad to be here,' she said, as I handed her into the dining-room out of the hall, and when we were seated she said:

‘What a fine old place, and what family pictures! You are a happy man, Mr. Halfacre, to live here.’

But I am not going to bore you with the commonplaces of two lovers. They all repeat the set phrases out of the copy-book of love — lessons learnt by generation after generation of bygone lovers, and to be learnt by lovers yet to come. Trifles that, seen through love’s magic glass, are magnified into matters of the greatest moment; and which, seen by mere dull mortal eyes, are mere specks and grains of dust. Nothing is so uninteresting as the ordinary conversation of lovers, except to the happy pair themselves. Least of all interesting is it when one of the pair feels that he is watched and bound to be on his good behaviour, as I was.

The cost of the conversation, as they say in France, that evening was therefore paid by the Colonel, who was infinitely amusing, and made my Aunt laugh heartily by telling her of Devonshire and its discomforts.

‘You know we thought Ilfracombe very damp and wet last year, but I assure you it was nothing to South Molton. I am ready to swear that it rained day and night for a month without stopping. Except in a water-cure establishment, I can’t fancy any one being there at all. As for Aunt Buller,

she might as well live in a bath at once. The partridges had all been drowned; the old birds, most of them early in the season, and the young ones later on.' He had scarce seen a feather all the time he was in the west.

So he went on, and Arethusa and I escaped observation. I felt awkward, as I knew my Aunt would watch me if she could. That wretched Mary Harbury was ever rising up with her sampler and thrusting it between me and Arethusa. As for Arethusa, she was decidedly dull. She had caught the infection from me, and seemed bored and constrained, but we looked at one another a good deal, and I fancied, whenever I gazed at her, I saw something which said, 'Have patience with me, and I will tell thee all.'

On the whole then, though it was not so lively as I could have wished, I was satisfied, and when we all went to bed early, I said to myself as I laid my head on my pillow: 'Under the same roof at last with Arethusa, and that roof our own. Here for a month too! What a treasure of time that seems! How many and what happy things shall occur in this month of September, 183-?

CHAPTER VI.

ARETHUSA AT MANDEVILLE HALL.

NEXT morning the Colonel and I were up betimes. Those were the days when colonels, however old, went out shooting before breakfast. We were out at six. There was a nice breeze and a strong scent. The harvest had been early, and it was nearly all in. As we beat the stubbles, covey after covey of strong fine birds rose, and as we both shot well,—the Colonel by far the better of the two—down fell bird after bird, and by half-past eight we had a heavy bag, and returned to breakfast. As for hares, there were so many that they quite bore out the gamekeeper's boast, and I am sure we shot enough in those two hours to pacify all the tenants, if those hares were sent to them as presents.

We were too hungry to wait for the ladies, and had done our breakfast by the time they came down; Arethusa looking as blooming as a blush-rose, and twice as sweet. Had she slept well? asked my Aunt.

‘Oh, very well. She had been so tired.’

After breakfast she must see the house. It would be too hot for shooting all the afternoon, and to judge by the shots all round the house we must have shot game enough to last for a month. So it was settled that I should take the Colonel and Miss Chichester round, and that we would not shoot again till the afternoon.

Alas ! alas ! how often have I looked back and thought of that day when it seemed to me as though I were bringing my bride into my own house, and showing her its treasures. It seemed to me so kind that Auntie should let me show the Hall, as though it were mine already ; for though Mandeville Hall was my Aunt's out and out, to do with it as she pleased, it appeared always taken for granted by her, as well as by every one else, that the estate was to be mine after her death. True there was that nasty Mary Harbury always rising up between me and my love. But what cared I for Mary Harbury, if Arethusa were true to me ? Nay ! what did I care for Mandeville Hall, or for the whole world, without Arethusa ? I rushed madly, therefore, into the duty of showman, and it was just as well that Aunt Mandeville retired to write letters, or perhaps she might have seen things in my behaviour that she would not have liked at all. As it was, I began my duty in solemn form.

We began in the hall, which I have already described to you long ago. Colonel Chichester looked on the family pictures as old friends. Many of the arms, too, he had handled in Mr. Mandeville's time. Such and such a banner he remembered, not because it was one that had been borne by some old Mandeville at Cressy or Agincourt, but because it had belonged to the Mandeville troop of Yeomanry in the year 1815, and had been presented by the Princess Charlotte. He lived with the things with which he had lived, cared little for imagination, and had small respect for antiquity. I am quite sure he thought a teapot a much better thing than the Portland Vase. Arthusa was rather sentimental, what the Germans call *schwärmerisch*, romantic, enthusiastic, but not the least vulgarly so. She looked at the hall and its fine proportions, the ancient louvre in the fretted roof, the two great stone chimney-pieces which had superseded that louvre; the tapestry in which grim figures flared and flaunted as the wind stirred it; the long line of Mandevilles; the good swords and helmets; the shirts and coats of mail; the morions and buff coats of the Commonwealth,—with soft swimming eyes, and seemed to take in at one glance all the glory of our ancient house. She asked few questions, not twenty in a minute, like our jesting young ladies, never waiting

to hear an answer; but every now and then she gazed tenderly at me, as much as to say, ‘All this and the fame of it will be yours.’

From the hall we went through the dining-room, drawing-room, and library,—rooms panelled with black oak, off which Aunt Mandeville had, with infinite trouble, got the white paint which some Gothic Mandeville had daubed over it a century before. In those two rooms were long rows of family pictures, so that the mind was bewildered with Sir Giles, and Sir Roger, and Sir John, Squire this and Squire that, and all their wives and children.

After we had exhausted them we went back into the hall, and were just going up the staircase that led to the state rooms, when Arethusa stopped before the White Lady, and said:

‘Pray, who is this? Hers was the second face I saw on coming here. Yours was the first, and as I entered the hall I saw those woeful features staring at me on the opposite wall.’

‘That,’ I said, ‘is our White Lady. I will show you her room presently.’

Upstairs we went, and I am sure no family housekeeper was ever half so good a guide. The King’s room, and Queen Elizabeth’s room, that is, the White Lady’s room, and the dressing-room off it, and the long gallery into which all the rooms

except the dressing-room opened. I explained them all. There was a deal to see and tell, but I am forced to say that I did not dilate very much on the White Lady and her history. I merely said that one of those rooms was supposed to be haunted by the lady from whom that portrait was taken, but that in all likelihood the story arose out of her peculiar dress and her woe-begone face.

‘Quite right,’ said Colonel Chichester. ‘There are no such things as ghosts. All stuff and nonsense; made up of indigestion, family portraits, old furniture, and strange beds. Never saw a ghost in my life, and hope I never shall.’

‘Do you believe in ghosts?’ asked Arethusa, as we were tripping downstairs, outstripping the Colonel, whose gout made him come down one leg first.

‘I believe in you, Arethusa,’ I replied; ‘and would that you returned my belief.’

‘Don’t be unreasonable; when did I come here?—only yesterday. Give a young lady law and time to recover her feelings.’

So here it was again, the same story; as soon as I tried to bring her to the point, she was as scared as a dove, and withdrew her heart behind its natural defence—her tongue.

‘What are you saying about ladies and law, Toosy?’ said the Colonel, who just then overtook

us. 'My advice to both ladies and gentlemen is to have as little to do with law as possible.'

'The law I was talking of, Papa, was another kind of law. The law you give a fox, or an eagle, or a hare, or a partridge, or anything that you are going to worry to death, before you begin to worry them. That is a law which all noble natures ought to practise. Doesn't some one say, "Hurry no man's cattle;" that means, don't go too close to their heels,—even a donkey may kick your brains out, if you stoop low enough to tease him!'

'Why, Toosy, you are quite an orator,' said the Colonel. 'You'll be the first speaker of a Woman's Parliament!'

'That I shouldn't like to be,' said Arethusa, 'for the Speaker hardly ever speaks, but sits and listens in a great wig, with a mace before him. Whenever I go to parliament I hope to have the free use of my tongue.'

All this time I was partly divided between admiration at Arethusa's cleverness, and disgust at being put off again in my love-making. But even then I made excuses for her, and thought how silly and stupid I had been in not giving her the 'law' she spoke of.

'Tell you what, Halfacre,' said the Colonel, 'I've had quite enough of this indoors work. My head reels with your family pictures and ancient

upholstery. After luncheon we must look after the partridges.'

'With all my heart, Colonel;' and I must have said 'With all my heart' in a very resolute way, for Arethusa looked hard at me, as though I were going to abandon her altogether for outdoor sports.

We found Aunt Mandeville in the conservatory looking after some of her pet plants. It was a noble building; high enough for palms—the very first conservatory, I believe, that Paxton built on the Crystal Palace ridge-and-furrow principle. There were two magnificent passion-flowers, trained up on screens, in it, dividing it into three equal parts, and under one of these we sat down, with the lovely flowers hanging over our heads.

'Have you seen it all?' asked my Aunt. 'Edward must have shown you everything. You have been more than two hours at it.'

'Oh, yes!' said Arethusa; 'we have seen everything—except the White Lady. She, of course, does not show herself by day?'

My Aunt's face darkened.

'She shows herself when she pleases. Is she not a woman? And it is woman's right to choose her own time.'

'I wish I believed in ghosts,' said Arethusa. 'Papa says there is no such thing; but that only

means that he has never seen one. How can he answer for all the rest of the world?’

‘All in good time, Miss Chichester,’ said my Aunt, musingly; ‘who can tell how many ghosts you may see before you die? But is it luncheon-time—let us go.’

I think the White Lady had chilled us all. For my own part I felt inclined to have her cut out of the frame again and restored to her garret. This respect for ghosts which lay deep in Auntie’s character, along with her reverence for the family and the estate, might lead to a quarrel with Arethusa if my darling expressed herself in a free-thinking way.

As soon, then, as it was possible the Colonel and I made a move and again girded up our loins for the slaughter. How many brace of birds fell to our guns; how we pursued them into the turnips; how beautifully the dogs behaved—those were not on dogless days of ‘drives;’ there was then no skulking in lanes and at corners of fields, shivering in the cold, while the beaters drove the birds over your heads;—how wet our feet got; how tired we were; how hungry before dinner, and how sleepy afterwards; what bad company we were for the ladies, and how the Colonel, in spite of supernatural efforts at politeness, fairly fell fast asleep in an easy chair; how I was only

prevented from following his example by a strong cup of tea, which made me lively just when liveliness was of no use, and sleepless when I ought to have been sleepy; how Aunt Mandeville and Arethusa gathered up their things and went up to bed at ten o'clock, leaving the Colonel snoring, and me somnolent. This is what happened on that golden First of September, a day that was to have made me so supremely happy.

I have since read, in one of the Fathers, a chapter on what he calls 'The Intemperance of Sleep.' In this respect that old gentleman seems to have been remarkably abstemious; for he says four hours' sleep is as much as a man ought to have; and then he goes on to say that many men are 'sleep-drunk;' so besotted with slumber that they lose their heads before men, and seem as though they were intoxicated. 'Against this vice,' he says, 'there are many remedies. The first is, never to eat more than one meal a-day, and that of parched peas. The second to moisten the said peas with water. The third is, never to do any work; for work makes a man's body tired, and so brings on sleep. The fourth is, to sit indoors in an uneasy seat, with a pin at the back and at the top of it, so that if you lean or loll about, you may be reminded of your duty. The fifth is, to tell your beads constantly for about eighteen hours a-day.

If you observe all these rules,' he says, 'you shall certainly conquer sleep, and lead a life of contemplation and prayer.' This worthy man lived a life of great sanctity and idleness somewhere in Egypt, near the Natron Lake, and died at the age of ninety, having done nothing but pray all his life. What Colonel Chichester would have said to these rules, I cannot tell,—or Major Plunger. I should like to have seen either of them sitting down to a dinner of parched peas and water once a-day, and counting their beads in an uneasy chair for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four.

'By Jove! I believe I have had a doze for five minutes,' said the Colonel. 'All those turnips,—never was so tired in my life. Where are the ladies?—gone to bed! then it's high time for us to go too.' To say was to do with the Colonel, especially in matters of sleep. So he clutched his candlestick, and I have no doubt in very much less than half-an-hour he was hard at work in his dreams beating endless fields of swedes, and bagging many hundred brace of birds. As for me, the tea having now roused me, I sat up a little later; but as I went to my room along the gallery, and passed the Colonel's door, I heard sounds issuing from it something between the roar of a distant waterfall and the organ in Westminster Abbey. Those sounds proceeded from the Colonel's nose, his horn of chase

with which he hastened on his phantom hounds, to beat those ghostly turnips, and point at those spectral birds. Every man, when he dreams of the chase, is the Wild Huntsman; and if he snores, it is but the demon clamour with which he urges on his grisly pack.

Next morning rose in rain, and the Colonel did not care to shoot. At breakfast my Aunt, on reading her letters, said:

‘How nice! Mary Harbury will come here the day after to-morrow, that will be Monday, and Mrs. Harbury will spare her to us for a week. I hope you will like Mary, Miss Chichester.’

‘I hope I shall like any of your friends, Mrs. Mandeville,’ was Arethusa’s prudent reply. ‘How old is Miss Harbury?’

‘Quite young,’ I broke in, most impudently; ‘barely seventeen, if so much.’

‘There are nice people of all ages,’ said my Aunt. ‘I like Miss Harbury very much. They are our nearest neighbours, and the estates touch.’

I really was afraid that Aunt Mandeville was going to bring in the ring-fence again; but she stopped short of it, out of respect to Arethusa, I suppose. Perhaps, because she was afraid of letting the cat out of the bag; of letting Arethusa know that she wished me to marry Miss Harbury. At

any rate, she stopped short of the ring-fence, though I saw it plainly enough in the distance.

‘I remember Mrs. Harbury in old days,’ said the Colonel. ‘She wasn’t what I call a nice person; so disputatious, and so ready to discuss religion with every one. Poor Mandeville couldn’t bear her; and I remember old Harbury, too. He was much older than his wife, and they were married several years before their daughter was born. Well! old Harbury used to come over here, and dine in this bachelor house, merely for the sake of escaping from Mrs. Harbury’s tongue, who fairly drove his soul out of his body, by informing him, in season and out of season, to take no care for his body, and consider his immortal soul. They said she used to feed him on rabbits, and that he never had any butcher’s meat. No wonder soul and body soon parted. Fancy a man living entirely on rabbits! Why, they make some people sick, and to others they are positively poisonous.’

‘Well!’ said my Aunt, returning to the charge, ‘I think Mary Harbury a very nice girl.’

The day after to-morrow, then, she was to come with her sampler, no doubt, this very nice girl, whom I was to like better than my own Arethusa.

‘Don’t you think, Edward,’ my Aunt went on, ‘we might ask Major Plunger and one of the

cornets, and, if he is in Leamington, the Count with the unpronounceable name. Then we shall be a merry party, and as soldiers are never afraid of anything, some of them can sleep in the state rooms.'

My Aunt said this in a resolute way, as though she would have given a good deal not to have been afraid of anything herself.

Yes! I thought we might. The more there were in the house the less my attachment for Arethusa would be remarked. I was ready to ask the whole regiment if Auntie wished it.

So while the rain poured the notes were written and despatched. I wrote the one to Count Manteuffel in my Aunt's name, as I was alone able to spell it.

'We will ask the Grubbs to dinner too,' said my Aunt, 'and then we shall have done our duty. We ought to do our duty, and as there is a moon they won't be upset.' So the Grubbs were asked to come and dine.

There was no shooting that afternoon, but the Colonel and I played billiards and Arethusa scored. I was no player, and the Colonel a very good one. He could give me fifty out of the hundred and beat me soundly. We were not so sleepy that evening, but nothing particular happened, except that I caught myself out ever so many

times staring in the maddest way at Arethusa Chichester.

Bed-time came, and the morning, and the evening, were the second day. The next day was Sunday, and I shall say nothing about it.

On Monday morning all the answers came. The Grubbs would be delighted, and so would Mr. St. Faith,—I had forgotten to say he was asked. As for Major Plunger, he would be too happy to come and stay a week, and so would Cornet Twentyman. We had left the choice of the subaltern to the Major, only premising that whoever came must be able to shoot. The Count was delighted,—in a letter written in much better English than Major Plunger's,—to make the acquaintance of so charming a lady as Mrs. Mandeville. Nothing would give him greater pleasure than to come, if he might only be allowed to go over to Leamington on business once or twice.

So they were all coming. Mary Harbury that day by herself, and the day after, the officers and the Count.

Now you are not to suppose that it was in my nature to be rude to Mary Harbury. She was my Aunt's friend, and sure of good treatment from me, only I utterly repudiated in my heart the honour for which my Aunt had pre-

destined me. I altogether declined to make love to Mary Harbury, or look upon her as my future wife. I was not going to be rounded off by any one.

To make a long story short, she came, and was duly introduced to the Chichesters. I saw Arethusa measure the new comer from head to foot at a glance, and I thought I saw an air of triumph in her own superior attractions, which seemed to say, 'If this is all that Warwickshire can show I am not at all afraid.'

Mary Harbury, on her part, rather shrunk back from Arethusa's eye. She was much less confident, and, as it seemed to me, much more of a girl and much less of a woman. When she finished by pulling out that everlasting sampler, that Penelope's web of moral maxims, worked in all the colours of the rainbow, Arethusa's victory was complete, and I consigned Mary Harbury and all her worsted works to the tasteless realms of bread-and-butter. Nay it would not have astonished me to see her come down to dinner in a pinafore, or to hear her beg pitifully for a little bit of lump sugar.

Mr. St. Faith came to dinner that day. My Aunt asked him to make up the party, else we should have been two gentlemen to three ladies, a thing Aunt Mandeville detested. It was well that he came, for the wet day had depressed all

our spirits, and Mary Harbury's arrival had sunk mine lower still.

Talk of the use of the Church and of clergymen! and dare to complain of their bad sermons! Why, such a man as Mr. St. Faith,—though his sermons were usually chopped straw, champed and chewed like an old horse with never a tooth in his head,—such a man, I say, was well worth thousands a-year, merely to go round the country keeping every one in good humour. He was so prosy in the pulpit, and so genial everywhere else. So good-natured, so sympathetic, with just the slightest dash of satire and irony in his composition. He was the leaven that was hid away in a circuit of five Warwickshire parishes, and had gradually leavened the whole dark mass. He was just the man to have to dinner on a wet day, when every one is apt to brood over his misfortunes and forget his manifold blessings. A misanthrope or a hypochondriac would have hired him to go about with him and make him merry; and I have no doubt that that unhappy Frenchman who, in the railway, had such an air of sadness, '*l'air si triste*,' that every one wondered at it till it was explained that he was going to be guillotined at noon, *parcequ'il va être décapité à midi*; — I say I have no doubt that unhappy criminal—a Tropmann perhaps—would have spent

his last hour more happily had he been seated next Mr. St. Faith in the train. And he was so natural and modest, and his kindness so oozed out of him without any effort on his part, it really was quite beautiful to behold him.

He then came and comforted us. The Colonel had a twinge of the gout, brought on by my Aunt's burgundy and over-walking. Did Mr. St. Faith trample on him morally or rub him the wrong way? Far from it; he listened to the Colonel's complaints with the air of a man who had never heard of the gout before, and was so sympathetic that he seemed to take most of the pain on himself. So amusing, too, that the Colonel so far forgot his gout after dinner as to drink some more burgundy. For my Aunt he had always some pleasant thing to say. It wasn't true that Mary Cooper had come to grief in London. Mary Cooper's aunt had seen her a week ago, and Mary was quite well and happy in a very respectable place.

'I am very glad to hear it,' said my Aunt; 'Mary was always a good girl, and I said I never would believe she had gone wrong till I heard it on better authority than Martha Blink's word. What stories people did tell! She would like to know what Martha Blink said now!'

'She has very little to say,' said Mr. St. Faith.

‘I saw her to-day, and all she could say was that she heard a travelling tinker from Birmingham say that when he was up in London last month, at Bartholomew Fair, he’d take his oath he saw Mary Cooper riding with a young man in a merry-go-round.’

‘Nasty, spiteful old thing, to go and take away a girl’s character on the word of a travelling tinker.’

‘Why, you see,’ put in Mr. St. Faith, who, like the Scotch minister, would have prayed for the ‘*puir de’il*’ if he had thought him hard pressed, ‘Martha Blink is very old, and has few friends. In spite of all we can do she has a hard time of it; and if a poor old woman is not to use her tongue, which is about the only active member she has left, I don’t see what she is to do. Besides, no one believes Martha Blink’s stories. They please her, and do no one else any harm.’

Then turning to me, Mr. St. Faith said: ‘I hear you shot famously, Edward; hardly missing once; and as for Colonel Chichester, both the keepers declare they have not seen such a shot this many a long day.’ If it wasn’t worth a twinge of the gout to gain such a character, all I can say is that the Colonel was most unreasonable.

‘I am coming over to Harbury very soon,’ said Mr. St. Faith to Mary Harbury. ‘My school-

children want some new patterns for a sampler, and I hear you have got such a pretty one.'

Now the good man might just as well have invited himself over to Harbury to eat bread-and-butter with Mary Harbury; at least, so it seemed to me; but I was quite wrong. The little kindly bit of flattery found its way in, and Mary Harbury, with many blushes, confessed she had brought the sampler with her, and would be only too happy to show it him after dinner.

How he found out that she was working a sampler no one could tell; but Mr. St. Faith's ears were like the king's in the proverb—everywhere. He heard and saw everything as it were by instinct.

'Mamma,' Mary Harbury went on, 'is very anxious just now about the state of the patriarchs and philosophers in a future state. She had a long conversation with Mr. Halfacre, the other day, about them, and said she thought his views very vague and undecided. Wouldn't you come over some day, Mr. St. Faith, and talk it over with her?'

'Certainly not,' said Mr. St. Faith. Then, as it were, remembering that this was a very positive assertion, he went on: 'I think it matters very little to us what the patriarchs and matriarchs and philosophers, male and female, have to expect

hereafter. We know enough of the goodness of God to feel sure that, if they were good in their generation, He will be good to them at the last day. I think, therefore, we may safely leave them to Him, and think rather of our own future state.'

'So mamma does,—at least, she is always talking about it. I sometimes think it a pity to live so much for the future, and so little for the present.'

'Yes!' said Arethusa, very decidedly. 'I recollect reading a story once, in Italian, about a man who took the death of Hector, in the Iliad, so much to heart, that he could get no rest at nights. It strikes me that it is just as absurd to care for the salvation of the patriarchs, who, I suppose, were very worthy, good sort of people.'

Mr. St. Faith was so amused at the notion of the patriarchs, Methuselah and the rest of them, being described as very worthy, good sort of people, that he burst out laughing, and turned the conversation. I think, too, that he feared, if the discussion was prolonged, Arethusa might bring out some very decided opinions, not to the benefit of Madam Harbury.

He dashed off, therefore, after his fit of laughter was over, in another direction, and asked Arethusa what she thought of Mandeville Hall.

'I think it quite charming; and those old state

rooms, and the White Lady, picture and all. I think everything about the place quite charming.'

'Yes, there are many things charming about it, though I don't know the White Lady is one of them. The worst is, no one seems to know anything about her history. Do you, Mrs. Mandeville?'

My Aunt looked hard at me as she said :

'There is some story about her, but I believe it was not a very pleasant one, and in every family there are things and persons best forgotten. Perhaps the White Lady was one of them.'

Mr. St. Faith knew Aunt Mandeville well enough to see by her manner that the White Lady was not a *persona grata*, and that, in fact, he had made a mistake in asking about her, so he dropped the subject; but what he said was the truth. No one except Aunt Mandeville and myself knew the rights of her story. There was only a vague tradition that the White Lady, at certain times of the moon, walked about Mandeville Hall. I forgot to say that the Colonel had taken Aunt Mandeville, Mr. St. Faith, Arethusa, and I, Mary Harbury, into dinner. As I did so, I would not have sworn that she had not that wretched sampler in her pocket, if she had one. But I was not so badly placed, after all. My Aunt sat at the top of the table, and I at the

bottom ; on either hand of me were Arethusa and Mary Harbury, while the Colonel was at my Aunt's right, and Mr. St. Faith at her left. I had full opportunity, therefore, to look right and left, and to declare, on the honour of a lover and a gentleman, that Mary Harbury could in no way compare with Arethusa Chichester.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW WE WENT OUT FISHING, AND HOW I SAT
UNDER THE PASSION-FLOWER.

MR. ST. FAITH was obliged to go away early, and when he left us we all collapsed. The Colonel's gout returned; Mary Harbury pulled out her sampler, which, by the way, she had forgotten, after all, to show him; Arethusa tried some songs, but they none of them suited her. I turned over the leaves for her, and my Aunt and the Colonel played at piquette. But do what we would, it was dull work. I wasn't going to sit by Mary Harbury, and admire her sampler. If I stayed too long by Arethusa's side, my Aunt might get angry. The Colonel's gout made him the least bit impatient; it must be confessed, too, that the cards were much against him. My Aunt was as placid as usual, and Mary Harbury seemed sunk in her own thoughts. Bed-time came, and away we went—I am sure all of us very happy to go to bed, even though it were to listen to the

steady downpour out-of-doors. Next morning I was up early, gathering a bouquet for each of the young ladies, but, like Benjamin's mess, Arethusa's was the best and biggest. I remember I did leave one lovely rose in Mary's bouquet, just to save appearances, but before they came down I plucked it out and put it into Arethusa's, that there might be no mistake! Arethusa's was received with a smile, and Mary's with a grin. It was a great relief to me to see that the awkward Mary shortly afterwards sat down on hers, and crushed it all to pieces; so that no one could tell, in its shattered state, how much better Arethusa's had been.

'What a beautiful bouquet!' said my Aunt, as she saw Arethusa's. 'How fresh the flowers look after the rain! Where is yours, Mary? Of course you had one?'

'Yes, indeed, I had,' said Mary; 'Mr. Halfacre picked it for me, but as ill-luck would have it, I have crushed it all to pieces.' So saying, she held it up for my Aunt's inspection.

'What do you say to some fishing, Colonel Chichester? The river is in fine condition, and full of trout.'

'Nothing I should like better, if you can lend me a rod.'

Yes, he could have a rod, and off we went.

The young ladies were to come down together across the park before luncheon to see how we got on.

Well, we had very good sport. If the Colonel was a better shot, I was a better fisherman. Besides, I knew the stream and the flies. Perhaps the water was hardly clear enough, but nothing is worse than too bright water. I forget how many pounds of trout we caught; all I know is that I caught most, and that they were all laid in a heap on the grass. About half-past twelve, Arethusa and Mary Harbury came down, and were amazed to see so many fish out of so small a stream.

‘It is not so small as you think,’ said I, standing up for our own Avon.

Arethusa and Mary both laughed at me, and Mary, brightening up at my contradiction, and perhaps remembering the worse bouquet, said: ‘Why I could step across it, or jump across it;’ and so saying, she ran like a wild thing down the steep bank and tried to jump over the stream, which there ran fast and deep down from the pool where we were fishing to a mill-dam below.

It took us all so much by surprise that there was no time to stop her. Few men could have leapt the river at that spot with so bad a take off. It was just one of these things that seem so easy, and yet are so hard to do.

In another instant Mary Harbury was over head and ears in the Avon, swept away rapidly towards the mill-dam.

Now I have told you long ago that I am not much of a hero; but what was to be done? The Colonel was too old and gouty to risk his life. So it was plainly my turn, and though, as I did so, I thought of the sampler, and wished I had been going in to fetch out Arethusa, in I went after Mary Harbury, swimming as hard as I could to catch her up, as her white form rolled rapidly down stream. I was only just in time, and time was everything. I did overtake her just as she got to the mill-dam, and before she got into the race, and I did succeed in pushing her to the bank; and then, getting my feet in the gravel, in dragging her on to the grass up the bank.

It seemed to me the work of an instant, and indeed it took little time. I deserved no praise except for my readiness in dashing in. All the rest seemed to come of itself. As for Mary Harbury she soon recovered her senses, and felt better than she could have thought, considering she had swallowed a deal of water. I can't say that she was nearly drowned, and so I did not deserve the Humane Society's medal, but she certainly would have been drowned if I had not caught her just when I did.

As she lay on the bank coming to herself, I remember thinking it would have been just as easy to save Arethusa. Why did some good power not put it into Arethusa's head to jump over the Avon in this silly way, and then I could have risked my life to save her. But this poor Mary Harbury, with her sampler in her pocket, why should I have to rush into the water after her?

By this time Arethusa came running, quite out of breath, having found a foot-bridge a little higher up. As for the Colonel, he inspected the operations from the other bank, and now the mill-people came, having at last found out what was the matter, and what sort of silver-fish they would have found in their dam when the water was drawn off. They had a phaeton, and into this we put Mary Harbury after we had made her swallow some elder-wine, and so we carried her back in great glee to the Hall.

‘Why, what in the world has been the matter?’ said my Aunt. ‘You have all been in the water except Colonel Chichester, I declare; and as for you, Edward and Mary, you have been over head and ears, I can see.’

‘Why,’ said Mary faintly, ‘you see I was silly enough to try to jump over the Avon where they were fishing, and then Mr. Halfacre jumped in after me and caught me up and pulled me out,

and saved my life. That is all, my dear Mrs. Mandeville.'

'All!' said my Aunt. 'All, and more than enough. You must go to bed, Mary, and I must send for Dr. Mindererus.'

It was all in vain for Mary Harbury to declare that she was not bad enough to go to bed. To bed she went; Dr. Mindererus, now getting on for eighty, came, put on his spectacles, and looked at her tongue, felt her pulse, said she had undergone a great shock, and must be kept quiet.

So Mary Harbury was disposed of for that afternoon at least. As for me, I was, quite against my will, the hero of the hour. The Colonel declared that I went into the Avon like a water-spaniel after a winged duck, and fetched Mary out quite as cleverly as any spaniel.

'Just like you young fellows; while we old fogies are making up our minds, you go in and win. Of course you must propose to Miss Harbury. She can't refuse you.'

'Of course I shall do nothing of the kind. It would add a new risk to saving young ladies' lives if one had to marry them afterwards. Besides, this was no question of life-saving. The miller or some of his men would have done the same, or the eddy would have thrown Miss Harbury on to the bank, and she would have scrambled out all right.'

‘No!’ said Arethusa, with a burst of feeling for which I blessed her. ‘Alone, not all the millers, nor all the millers’ men, in the world, would have brought Miss Harbury out. As for the eddy, it only shot towards the bank to shoot off again into mid stream. No! Mr. Halfacre, you saved Miss Harbury’s life.’

Now was I not the most unfortunate of men, to go and save the life of the girl for whom I did not care one bit, and to be told I ought to marry her? Why did not Arethusa Chichester try to jump the Avon and fall in? except that I am sure, had she tried the leap, she would have cleared it like a roe, instead of floundering into it like Mary Harbury.

However, there was no help for it. I was the hero of the day, and when we went in to luncheon, my Aunt seemed so pleased, and Brooks was so patronising, that I had to accept the situation, as the slang now is, and console myself with thinking that Mary Harbury was safe in bed, taking Dr. Mindererus’ saline draughts, and that her sampler, which no doubt was in her pocket, was spoiled for ever, while I was sitting next to Arethusa Chichester.

After luncheon my Aunt sat down to write a long letter to Mrs. Harbury, to tell her of the accident, and to ease her mind, in case absurd

reports got abroad. Give Brooks two hours start in the servants' hall, and all Warwickshire would have heard by tea-time that Miss Harbury was going to be married next week to Master Edward, 'all along of Master Edward's jumping into the water after her, like a Newfoundland dog, and bringing her out.'

Perhaps he might have added: 'They were saying Miss Chichester gave Miss Harbury a push and shoved her in, because she too be in love with Master Edward.'

Nothing is too absurd for the swallows of the frequenters of the servants' hall; and so, if there is anything to be told in a house, the sooner the heads of that household tell the truth about it the better.

Aunt Mandeville therefore sat down and told the truth to Mrs. Harbury.

The Colonel also retired to write letters. He had meant to shoot, but the shock of seeing Mary Harbury rolling down the stream had been too much for him, and he had some more twinges of gout.

Mary Harbury in bed—my Aunt writing letters in her own room—the Colonel doing the same in his; where were I and Arethusa Chichester? Where do you think? In the conservatory,—with the fresh bloom of the passion-

flower just clearing our heads,—side by side. Now I felt that my hour was come.

‘That was well done and bravely done this morning, Mr. Halfacre. I always knew your heart was in the right place.’

‘Indeed! and what is the right place for my heart? Pray tell me!’

‘The right place for every man’s heart is his own breast. Better in his own keeping than in that of any one else.’

‘But suppose it slips away from him in spite of himself; suppose he can’t keep it; suppose he is like the giant who had no heart in his body?’

I was a great fool to give Arethusa this chance. She caught me up in a moment.

‘The giant who had no heart in his body was a dolt, and came to grief, and so will every one who is not master of his own heart.’

‘I am not master of mine,’ I said, ‘and yet I shall come to joy if you will keep it for me.’

‘And suppose I do as they did to the giant’s heart in the fairy tale; suppose I squeeze it, and crush it, and break it, and you die, like the poor giant?’

‘If I am dead I shall be past praying for; but giant or no giant, you have my heart, and if you crush it and break it I shall die, and you will be a cruel woman, Arethusa.’ And then, throwing

all tongue-fence on one side, I said: 'Arethusa Chichester, I am madly in love with you, and you know it.'

'I do know it, and I do feel it, Edward Halfacre. And, if I do not give way to the feeling myself, it is because I know and feel, too, that your Aunt will never countenance the feeling. Women are sharp-sighted creatures; and though she is very kind to me, I feel and see as plainly as if she had spoken it to my face, that Mrs. Mandeville will never consent to our marriage. It is not yesterday or to-day, but long ago, at Ilfracombe and in London, that my woman's wit taught me this, and I said to myself, why encourage this boyish passion? Let it wither as the corn by the way-side withered, and let me not be the cause of quarrel between Edward Halfacre and his Aunt.'

'But you do care for me a little, Arethusa! Your feelings towards me are not all duty to my Aunt.'

'Perhaps I care for you a great deal too much. Who can tell?—time will show. There, now be quiet, Mr. Halfacre—Edward.'

If you think I am going to tell you what brought about all these disjointed expressions from Arethusa, you are much mistaken, most inquisitive reader. I hate curiosity in men and women; and, if you fancy I am writing this book

to let you know things which were done in confidence, and can only be described as 'strictly private,' you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Besides, have you no imagination? Must you see everything in black and white? Have you no soul? Were you never a lover? If not, I pity you. If you have been, how would you like your secrets, your declarations, your approaches, your storm to be made as public as the Gazette of the siege of Sebastopol—a town which I may remind you was assaulted many times before it fell? No; at certain times all lovers should take the veil. It was not for nothing that a mist fell upon Dido and Æneas when they entered that fatal cave. Exercise your imagination, therefore, but do not dare to ask me why it was that Arethusa uttered those fragments of speech.

I am sure I can't say if it were a thousand years or five minutes that we had been sitting under that wicked Passion-flower, when we heard Aunt Mandeville calling 'Edward!' at one end of the conservatory, and Colonel Chichester 'Toosy!' at the other. In this respect we were worse off than Adam and Eve after they had eaten their forbidden fruit, for we heard two voices.

I think it was the late lamented Prince Consort who said, 'In a doubtful case do nothing;' and, though it was long before he said it, it was just

what we did,—that is to say, we started asunder, and stood up at a sort of regulation distance apart—just within shaking hands distance, in short.

‘Why, Edward—Why, Toosy, I have been looking for you everywhere.’ So spoke Aunt Mandeville and the Colonel, combining their assault, as they came up to us.

Somehow or other I was more of a man since my exploits of the morning and afternoon; and I felt that, if I had gone into the water for Mary Harbury, I would willingly go through fire for Arethusa. So I stood up for both of us; not like a certain lord I know, who always gets behind his wife’s petticoat, but like a chivalrous lover.

‘Why, Aunt, we knew both you and Colonel Chichester were writing letters, and so we sat down in the conservatory, and had a talk.’

‘It must have been a long one,’ said Aunt Mandeville, ‘for I sent off my letter to Harbury more than an hour ago, and the Colonel was done writing his letters before I had done mine. I saw him walking up and down on the terrace. You, Edward, I fancied had gone out for a long walk, and I thought Miss Chichester was in her own room, or with that poor dear Mary Harbury; but I never expected that you had been all this time in the conservatory.’

Observe the ‘poor dear Mary Harbury.’

‘Dear’—certainly dear, at any price, and that I should have been forced by circumstances to save her on the morning of the very afternoon that I and Arethusa sat under the Passion-flower.

I could not quite make out whether Aunt Mandeville was very angry, or only pretending; perhaps it was only to bring in ‘poor dear Mary Harbury;’ but I could very well see that Arethusa was quite right, and that my Aunt disliked her. Did that make me like Mary Harbury any more? Let any lover answer. Of one thing I am quite sure, that it is all in vain to cram even a very nice young lady, as Mary Harbury was, down a young man’s throat against his will, especially if he has already set his heart on some other young lady twice as nice and twice as good-looking. It is not in human nature, I say; and I hope none of you wise parents or guardians, who read this most true and pathetic story, will ever think of doing anything of the kind. If you do I can only say that I hope all your plans and schemes will be foiled and thwarted.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE COUNT AND THE MAJOR CAME TO
MANDEVILLE HALL.

THAT was the day the Count and Major Plunger and Cornet Twentyman were to come to spend a week. As we were pretty full on our side of the house, though we could have taken two of them in, it was settled that they should all sleep on the other side of the house, in the State rooms. If so, one of them must have the White Lady's room, and this honour we intended for the Count. Of course you are not to fancy that my Aunt at all encouraged the idea of a haunted room. There are people I know who would give twenty thousand pounds more for an old family mansion with a ghost in it: it is so respectable. But these are generally *nouveaux riches*. In fact, ghosts are blessings more appreciated by those who have them in their absence. Aunt Mandeville, for instance, thought the White Lady rather a bore, though I am sure she partly believed in her; and so she never would

admit that there was so much as a haunted room in the house.

She was not so unfeeling as that lady of quality whose butler cut his throat, and who, in talking over the matter to the rest of the servants, said, 'Poor John has cut his throat, and is gone. No doubt his ghost will walk about the house; but remember whoever sees him loses his or her place;' the consequence being that no one saw John. Aunt Mandeville was not so brutal as that. Besides, the White Lady was one of the family, and not to be treated as a servant; but my Aunt never spoke of her, except in the most distant way.

But enough of the White Lady.

The Count, and Major Plunger, and Cornet Twentyman have all come over together, and have just been announced by Brooks, who makes an awful hash of the Count's name. What he meant to say no one can tell, but what he said sounded like 'Madshovel.' Yes, 'Count Madshovel,' 'Major Plunger,' 'Mr. Twentyman.' That was how he announced them.

My Aunt was most gracious, and the Count made her a profound bow.

'I am so very glad to see you, Count Mantoiffel,' said Aunt Mandeville, pronouncing the name like a born German.

'How very well you pronounce my unhappy

name,' said the Count 'Mantoiffel.' 'Quite right ; teuf in German spells "toif."'

'My nephew, Mr. Halfacre, taught me,' said Auntie. 'It is not so very difficult, after all, when you know that *teuf* spells *toif*.'

'But there is something still more odd about my name to hear it so well sounded in this house, for this is the house the Manteuffels sprang from. Yes,' seeing my Aunt's face full of wonder, 'Mandeville Hall is what the Germans call the *Stammhaus*, the original seat of the Manteuffels. Manteuffel is only a barbarous, middle-age, German rendering of Mandeville ; and the first Count Manteuffel was an English knight called Mandeville, who went away from Warwickshire in the fourteenth century to fight the heathen on the Baltic, and was made a Count of the Holy Roman Empire. Strange, too, that Manteuffel, if it means anything in German, means *man devil* ; so that you see in its barbarous spelling there is still Mandeville at the bottom of it.'

'Strange, indeed !' said my Aunt. 'As all the old Mandevilles of this branch are extinct, I suppose we must welcome you in Mandeville Hall as a cousin and collateral, though a long way removed.'

'I have no doubt of the truth of what I say ; we came from England and Warwickshire, and we

bear the same arms to this day ;' and then he held up the inevitable signet which all Germans carry on their middle finger, and showed my Aunt the old Mandeville coat: Argent, three lozenges conjoined in fesse, gules, within a bordure sable.

'The same arms, I see,' said my Aunt. 'Some day or other I must have a hunt among the family muniments and try to find out something of this fourteenth century Mandeville who went off to fight the heathen on the Baltic.'

You should have seen the amazement of Major Plunger and Cornet Twentyman as they stood by listening to this conversation. No village boy at a peep-show could have stared and gaped more than the Major when he heard Aunt Mandeville utter without an effort the Shibboleth of the Count's name. Yes! she said it as clear as a bell, 'Mantoiffel:' there could be no mistake about it.

'As you are one of the family,' my Aunt went on to the Count, 'you won't object to sleep in one of the State rooms; they are not often slept in, but we are nearly full on our side, and we have put Major Plunger and Mr. Twentyman over on that side with you, so you will have company.'

'Oh, no!' The Count was charmed to sleep wherever 'my lady' chose to put him. Besides, had he not with him his friends those gallant soldiers, the Major and Mr. Twentyman? As it was getting

late we all went off to dress, and in due time met in the hall before dinner.

We were only waiting for Dr. Mindererus, who had been asked to fill Mary Harbury's place, and for the Grubbs, our next-door neighbours.

How the Grubbs got into Mandeville parish, nobody knew. They had been there for generations; always the same. One would have thought they would have died out or been ruined, by some extravagance, as their estate at the Warren was not at all large; but no, they neither died out nor were they ruined. On the contrary, they seemed always thriving, never had too many children, and looked very sleek and comfortable. There was a report, or rather a tradition, that the house of Grubb was, like the house of Austria, very lucky in its matrimonial alliances, and that, whenever a Grubb married, he married for money—now an alderman's niece, now a sheriff's daughter, now a grocer's grandchild. It was also said that they had mines in Cornwall, and stone-quarries in Ireland. They were fixtures in Mandeville parish, like the stocks and the pound; no one cared for them very much, but then no one ever quarrelled with them, and so every one got on tolerably with them.

While I have been telling you this, and letting you into some parish secrets, they have been tak-

ing off their cloaks in the hall. Now the Grubbs are upon us: 'Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Grubb,' bellowed Brooks.

Mr. Grubb looked like what used to be called 'a jolly good fellow;' and certainly his appearance might have inspired the famous chorus that runs in those words. He looked like the incarnation of old port. He was not so short as he looked, because he was very broad and deep. A section through the middle of him lengthways would have shown great inequalities of level. His great engineering difficulty was in front, and the gradient from his knee to the highest button of his waistcoat was about one in five. His face was ruddy, sleek, and shiny. His nose was a lantern unto his paths; it shone like a carbuncle. His eyes were small and twinkling; his hands red, fat, and flabby. But in spite of everything he had a genial look as though he could go straight across country, crack a bottle, and sing a good song against any man in 'the shires.'

He waddled up to Aunt Mandeville, and said, 'How d'ye do, madam? I hope you are quite well,' and then he subsided into an easy-chair, and began to talk to old Mindererus.

Mrs. Grubb was a very angular, gawky woman — very scraggy, gaunt, and raw-boned. I do not know if you understand what I mean

when I say that she never sat down on any chintz cover that she did not ruck and rumple it all up. Chair-covers and sofa-covers, chintz or tammy,—*crêtonnes* were not then invented, silly!—it was all alike; they all rose in rebellion under her. A chair or a couch that she had just left, looked more like a magpie's nest than anything else. I remember on that occasion she wore an amber satin dress, with green trimming, and she had on a scarlet toque or turban, with a bird of paradise on it. Altogether she was fearfully and wonderfully clad. Lucky for her that the Parish Bull—also a near neighbour—had not been invited; he really must have tossed her into the chandelier. She had no conversation, and very little manners. Altogether she was neither useful nor ornamental; but was she not the wife of Grubb's bosom? and, I'll be bound, a good wife into the bargain, in spite of her bad taste.

Miss Grubb was what may be called the young lady of commerce, by which I do not at all mean that she was a tradesman's daughter—far from it. I mean by the term that she was everybody's money. She was like a reading-lamp, or a tea or a coffee-pot; now do you understand? You are so dull! I mean, of course, that she was just like many hundred thousand other young ladies whom you may meet, if it be ever your ill

luck to meet so many; against whom nothing can be said, but of whom it can only be said that they are all exactly alike,—made to order,—and therefore extremely uninteresting. You might as soon fall in love with one of them, as be in raptures with the bat's-wing burner over your hall-door.

It is true that some one in the borough of Warwick had said Miss Grubb was very clever, and 'that time would show;' but up to that time Miss Grubb had kept all her cleverness to herself. She was like some of Butler's sermons—not long, but deep,—so deep that few can understand them. All I can say is, that if Miss Grubb were deep, it was that sort of depth that never came to the surface.

Looking back on them philosophically, I am inclined to believe that the Grubb family here on earth were, when I knew them, in a state of development and transition to a better state. To them the world was really, what divines tell us, a probation; some day or other they would exchange this abode of clay for the mansions of the angels. Here they were Grubbs, but there they would be butterflies; out of the brown chrysalis would have shot forth a bright and airy thing. If this be true, Providence had been most unkind to them, and has much to make up to them in a future state, poor things! Added to which

comes a very nasty thought. What if some of us gay things should find that we have had our butterfly-wings here on earth, and may have to crawl about in another world as ugly, uninteresting, and unsociable as the Grubbs of Mandeville parish?

At dinner, my Aunt gave her arm to Count Manteuffel; I was told off to Miss Grubb; Major Plunger took Mrs. Grubb; Mr. Twentyman got the prize of the day, Arethusa; Old Grubb and Dr. Mindererus had no one at all. Was Mary Harbury missed? Not by me, and I should think not by any one else.

When I tell you that I sat at the bottom of the table, with Old Grubb on one side and his daughter on the other, that beyond Old Grubb was Major Plunger, and beyond Mrs. Grubb Mr. Twentyman, you may imagine how many fences,—nay, I may even say buffers—I had between me and any pleasure. All the crystallisation of the company, all its art, and form, and grace, were at the other end of the table. It was like looking back at the Alps from the plains of Lombardy. Between me and those snowy, sunny peaks, was a great waste of dull flatness. I could hear that the Count was making himself very agreeable to my Aunt, and that Dr. Mindererus, who was a good talker, was mumbling out something round his one tooth to Arethusa. On Mr. Twentyman's side,

absolute silence reigned. He was a good horseman and a brave officer, but talking was not his forte. Besides he had a dread of saying anything to a lady, because, he said, if he threw away the weather and other common topics, who could tell that he might not be called on to say something else? Like a prudent general, therefore, he always kept the weather in reserve, and rarely touched on it before dessert. Then he might be heard bringing out some such lively expression as,—‘It was very cold yesterday,’ in winter; or, ‘How hot it has been to-day,’ in summer; but by that time of the repast every right-minded young lady is distracted between trying to put on her gloves, and watching the mistress of the house, so as to catch her hint to move. How, I ask, can even such prodigal attempts to sow the seed of conversation be expected to thrive? No! if a man will wait till June to sow his wheat, he can’t look for a crop.

It is not recorded if Major Plunger said anything. My own opinion is that Mrs. Grubb, in spite of her angularities, was better company than her daughter. At any rate she would have dropped her glove, or her fan, or her napkin, or her handkerchief, one or all of them, over and over again. Or you might have felt that she was gradually getting entangled in the tablecloth, and if you did

not come to the rescue everything would be swept off the table. That alone would have brought about conversation. A sense of common peril and present help would have roused you and made Mrs. Grubb grateful, and you might have talked about relapsing fever, or Convalescent Homes, or even the Poor Rates, or Irish ingratitude, and have ended by finding that after all this very angular person had some good points,—as, indeed, an angular person must have points. You would have been amused, and gone home, feeling that you had been very unjust for several causes, and blessing that unhappy habit of picking up everything, which brought about that little entanglement with the tablecloth, and so opened the gate to a very pleasant insight into your neighbour's character. All this, mind you, if your mind had been free for this sort of moral dissipation, and not absolutely engrossed as I was by the thought of Arethusa under the Passion-flower, and how lovely she now looked, with a flush of triumph on her face, sitting side by side with that blockhead, Twentyman, on whom all her charms were wasted,—because he was too great a dolt to avail himself of his opportunity.

Some such feeling, no doubt, will be that of the lost with Dives when they see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.

Only one amusing thing happened during dinner to enliven our end of the table. Mrs. Jellybag, our cook, was great in confectionery, and, I suppose, hearing the Count was coming, had built up an enormous *Schloss Manteuffel* of barley sugar, as one of the sweets. Inside it was full, I fancy, of trifle, but the walls were sugar of the stickiest sort. I do not think the taciturn Twentyman had ever seen such a work of art in his life. I have heard, indeed, that old Twentyman was a sugar-baker, but he might be that, and yet not treat his children to barley-sugar castles. Perhaps, like the poor shoemaker's wife, sugar-bakers' children go sugarless to bed. It was clear, however, that Twentyman had a sweet tooth, for when the gorgeous fabric came round, he dug into it with a will, destroyed the fosse, and stormed the keep; piling great heaps of spoil upon his plate. I saw him stuff a huge piece into his jaws, and knew at once it must be all up with him. He grew red in the face. Red, do I say? he grew purple! His eyes rolled; he could not open his mouth; his tongue clove to his teeth; he was caught in a sugar-trap; and Brooks—who patted him on the back, fancying that he had a bone in his throat,—only made matters worse. At last I had to lead him out of the room, and make them bring a little hot water. By the aid of this he

gradually got the sugar out of his mouth, and re-appeared. From that day forth, I'll be bound,—sugar-baker or no sugar-baker,—Mr. Twentyman, however many castles he may have sacked and spoiled, has never ventured to eat another bit of a barley-sugar castle.

Still it was a dreary dinner, and had I not been consoled with that scene in the conservatory, I could scarce have sat it out.

After dinner Major Plunger and Mr. Twentyman consoled themselves with port; Dr. Mindererus and I and Count Manteuffel had some talk, in which we found the foreigner quite a match for both of us; and then we joined the ladies.

We found Aunt Mandeville engaged in giving the Grubbs a faithful account of the rescue in the morning; and Miss Grubb, who, I suppose, felt bound to say something, was in the act of uttering, 'Dear me, how very romantic; just like Hero and Leander.'

In what the likeness to Hero and Leander consisted, let Miss Grubb—now, no doubt, the happy mother of children, and bound to teach them mythology—declare. I rather think that before we came in my Aunt or Mrs. Grubb must have said of me that I was a 'hero,' and Miss Grubb had mixed up my being a hero with Hero and Leander; only in that case she must have made

Hero a man, and Leander,—which she perhaps spelled *Leanda*,—a woman.

All this was hushed up when we came in, so far as I was concerned; but the Grubbs were open-mouthed in inquiries for Mary Harbury, whom they shortly went upstairs to inspect. It was a great satisfaction to me, of course, to hear that the ‘poor thing’ was very comfortable, and Dr. Mindererus, who glided up-stairs shortly afterwards, gladdened us all by declaring that she would be ‘quite well to-morrow.’

I don’t believe that any one ever came to Mandeville Hall without being struck by the White Lady and asking after her history. Count Mantouffell was no exception to this rule. I saw him looking at the portrait in the hall before dinner, and again as we passed through it to the drawing-room. When the little excitement about Mary Harbury had passed over, he sat down near my Aunt and said, in a very John Bullish sort of way: ‘I should like to know something about the lady in white, whose picture is in the hall.’

‘That is a picture,’ said my Aunt, pursuing her usual policy, ‘about which the Mandeville family have no very pleasant recollections. We never talk of her.’

The Count was not rude enough to carry his John Bullism further and say, ‘Why, then, do you

hang such a remarkable picture up in the hall, if you don't allow people to talk of it?' but he did not quite drop the subject, and said: 'I only asked because, at home, we Manteuffels have a White Lady of our own, what we call a *Weisse Frau*, and the French a *Dame Blanche*. Our White Lady is believed to walk about the castle at Königsberg at certain times of the moon. I suppose your White Lady never does anything of the kind?'

'I have never seen her,' said Aunt Mandeville, evading the question; 'but you can't believe in ghosts, Count Manteuffel?'

Before the Count had time to answer, old Grubb, who had been listening, came to her rescue and said: 'Oh, do let us have a good ghost story. Say that people don't believe in them? Why, there isn't a farmer in Warwickshire who doesn't believe that the one-handed Boughton drives about the country at midnight in his coach and six, and makes wayfarers hold open the gates for him. Then he throws them out of the coach something which looks like chips of wood, and are left as worthless; but it's real gold, and old "Thomas Noon," who lives near Newbold Grange, told me that his great-grandfather once held open a gate for the one-handed Boughton, and had some of those chips thrown out at him, which he left behind him; but it so happened that one tiny chip fell into his

shoe, and when he got up next morning and took up his shoe, if there wasn't an old-fashioned half-guinea. Thomas Noon said that his great grandfather wasn't long in getting back to the gate to pick up the chips he had left; but of course they were all gone. He kept the bit of gold a long time, but at last a bad harvest came and he parted with it.'

'Just like our Wild Huntsman,' said the Count; 'but if you would like to hear something of a ghost-story—though it is not quite a ghost-story—I will tell you one.'

'One branch of my family is settled in Sweden, far up the country among the hills, not far from the Norwegian frontier, and, like all hill-folk, the peasants are great believers in witchcraft and supernatural beings. One thing that they firmly believe is, that the hills and fells are peopled by a supernatural fairy race, who are, as it were, half-men half-fairy, and can, under certain conditions, be brought to live with and behave like good Christians. The girls are very pretty in the face; and, in fact, their only deformity is a cow's tail, which hangs on them where cows' tails usually hang on cows. The comfort is that if a young peasant falls in love with one of these lassies, and carries her off and marries her, her cow's tail drops off when the clergyman gives the bridal pair his

blessing; and in such a case it is the bridesmaids' duty to stand close behind and hide the tail, and to pick it up and conceal it as soon as it falls off.

' Well,—to make a long story short,—once on a time there was a young smith who had to go up to the fells to look after some kine that were feeding up there, and as night overtook him he had to make for one of the shanties or shielings upon the fell, built as a shelter for the lassies who are up there to make butter and cheese in the summer, and also for belated folk at all times of the year, like our smith. It was late autumn and no Christian folk were left on the fell; but when he got near the shanty he saw a light through the window, and knew there must be something "uncanny" inside. And so, indeed, there was, for when he knocked at the door, and—when no one came—opened it, and walked in with his "God's peace," if there weren't two of the ugliest trolls he ever saw, with long cows' tails behind and noses as long as pitchforks, cowering over the fire, while, away in the corner, was the prettiest lass he had ever set eyes on, trying to hide her cow's tail by keeping close to the wall.

' He was in a terrible fright, but our smith was no coward. He had his gun, too, and, though you can't shoot a troll dead, you can bind him fast by firing a shot over him. The trolls, every one

knows, can't bear thunder ; and if a gun is fired over them, they think it is thunder, and it scatters their brains. So, just as the two ugly trolls were going to fly at him, up to his shoulder our smith puts his gun, and bang goes the shot over their heads. There they all stood stiff, like Lot's wife, and there he left the father and mother standing. As for the lassie he went up to her, and cut her above her breast with his knife, and then she was able to stir ; and next morning, when it was light, he took her down with him into the dale, and, after she had lived a little while with his father and mother, still with her cow's tail dangling behind her, they all went to the church, and they were married. The bridesmaids stood close behind, the nasty cow's tail dropped off, and ever after she was like any other decent woman.

‘Were they happy? Well, I am sorry to say not very. I suppose a marriage with one of the hill-folk is a mistake—an “ill-assorted marriage,” as you call it. At any rate, there was incompatibility of temper, and, to tell the truth, it was all on the husband's side. She was patient and gentle as a lamb, while he got drunk and scolded, and beat and banged her till he made her black and blue. So things went on a long while, till one day he had a horse to shoe in a great hurry for a traveller who wanted to get down the country as quick as he

could. He was a good smith,—Anders, what you call Andrew; but that day he seemed as if all his skill had left him; now the shoes were too small; now they were too big. It looked as though the shoeing would never be over, and the traveller stood by and swore, and his wife called the smith to dinner, but still he never came because he could not get the horse shod.

‘Well, at last the wife went over to look after him herself, and to know why he did not come when the brose was ready, and the bairns calling out for their dinner.

‘“It’s no use you coming bothering here,” said the smith. “Take *that*, and be off about your business. I must shoe this horse.”

‘Now you must know “*That*” was a good box on the ear, but the wife bore it like an angel.

‘“And why can’t you shoe the horse?” she said.

‘“I’m sure I can’t tell, only the shoes, with all my hammering, will never come to fit the horse’s foot.”

‘“Tut!” said the wife; “naught but that? Just give me the shoes that won’t fit?”

‘Well, the man gave her the shoes and looked on, and so did the traveller; and they both crossed themselves, as well they might, at what they saw.

‘The wife went up to the horse, first with one

shoe and then with all four; and when she lifted up his leg, and found the shoe either too big or too little, she just took it between her fingers, and bent it about till it fitted to a *T*.

‘Then she turned to her husband, and said, in a low, soft voice: “This hand that bent the shoes could have stricken you dead any time that you were banging me, had I so willed it. Now shoe the horse, there’s a good man, and come over to dinner.”’

‘They say the smith was a better husband ever after; and, if he banged and beat any one, it was not his wife.’

‘That’s my story,’ said the Count; ‘and I should like to know what you ladies think of it?’

Of course all the ladies liked it very much, and Mrs. Grubb, who had by this time fidgeted the sofa on which she was sitting into a rampant state, declared she wished there were many wives like that in England. If there were, the men would not have it all their own way.’

Arethusa thought, and I quite agreed with her, it was a pity the poor wife had not shown her strength before she had been so often beaten.

‘That would spoil the story,’ said the Count. ‘Besides, it is well known that “woman’s mission is submission,” and this story only inculcates the lesson.’

Miss Grubb and Mr. Twentyman and Major Plunger said nothing, as it was their nature to be silent. The Major, I believe, was asleep with his eyes open. Perhaps some of the sugar was still sticking in Mr. Twentyman's mouth. Dr. Mindererus, I must tell you, had slipped off in his quiet way, and was fast asleep in his carriage about the time the story came to an end.

But Mr. Grubb was alive and merry; he would not be put off from his ghost-story, and called on me for one.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘what shall it be?—shall it be the Sherbrooke Ghost, that best authenticated of all ghost-stories? or shall it be the Airlie Drummer, which was proved in a court of law? or shall it be the Brown Lady of Rainham, that most loathly lady, who condescends to appear to footmen as well as guardsmen, and is equally detestable to all?’

No! old Grubb would have none of those. He thought he had heard them all.

‘Do you know the Three Fishermen of Unst?’ I asked.

‘No! he had never heard of them; what did they do?’

‘Once on a time there were three fishermen of Unst——’

‘Where is Unst?’ asked Aunt Mandeville. ‘I never heard of such a place.’

Lucky for Aunt Mandeville that she wasn't a young gentleman—a candidate for some place in the Civil Service; for which it is absolutely necessary to have the geography of the British Isles at their fingers' ends.

'Unst, Auntie, is the most northerly part of the British Islands. It is one of the Shetland group; and the great awk used to breed there when there were any great awks; and Stephenson built there a magnificent lighthouse.'

'How did you hear about it?' asked Twentyman, at last opening his lips. I need not tell you that Twentyman would never have passed for a direct commission now-a-days.

'Were you ever there?' asked Grubb.

'If you ask me so many questions, I shall never get to my story. You are as bad as the House of Commons on Friday night,—all asking questions, and scarce waiting for an answer. I have already answered my Aunt, and I now proceed to say to you, Mr. Grubb, that I never was in Unst, and to you, Twentyman, that I heard all about it, and this story as well, from my friend Scatterbrains, who was up there in his yacht.'

'Who was Scatterbrains, and what was the name of his yacht?' asked the incorrigible and over-curious Twentyman.

'I'll tell you if you will spell yacht,' I an-

swered. 'If you can't spell it, consult the Peerage and the Yachting Calendar, and let me get on with my story.'

'Get on then,' said Twentyman; 'I'm not going back to the nursery to spell yacht.'

I am sure Twentyman never could spell yacht, either in or out of the nursery; any more than he could have spelled 'idiosyncrasy,' or 'irrelevant,' or 'veterinary,' or 'nondescript;' but I am also quite sure that he would have cut down any three grammarians, were they Suidas, Hesychius, and Photius,—whom he might have met in fair fight. But as it was, I had silenced him, and was allowed to go on.

'Once on a time there were three fishers of Unst, and they went out to fish, and never came back at night. They ought to have been quite safe, the old wives said, as they sat knitting their stockings out of Shetland wool; for they had a child's caul in the boat,—and who ever heard of any one being drowned that had a child's caul? Be that as it may, they never came back, and their wives and children were in great grief all that afternoon. But at night they came back; for when Mary Jameson, the wife of one of them, went to bed, she thought she would know the truth; and so she set a pail of water, which she had drawn from the running stream without taking

breath, and she lighted nine candles, four in each corner of the room, and the other five about the pail. Then she walked nine times about the pail, the wrong way of the sun, and sang or murmured out these words,—

“Ye for whom we greet and wail,
Come home and gather round this pail.”

Then she went to bed backwards, and when she put on her night-gown she turned it inside out. You may fancy she did not go to bed to sleep. No, it was to be awake and watch, and sure enough between twelve and one,—not just at twelve; but between the hours—in came John Jameson, her husband, and Tam Brown and Andrew Speirs, the two that had gone out with him to the fishing, and she marked that Andrew had still the child’s caul round his neck in a bag. They looked round the room, but said nothing; but each went up to the pail, and looked at his face in it; and Mary saw their faces pale as death, and how the seawater dropped from their hair and clothes. From the pail they all passed to the bedside, and looked hard at Mary, as though they wished to say something; but they said nothing; and then they stood for a moment near the fire, where the embers burnt low, and so they passed out of the door, and were gone.

‘And when they were gone, Mary put the place tidy, and went and told the other wives, and they all knew that Mary had seen the fetches of her husband and their own, and that neither John Jameson, nor Tam Brown, nor Andrew Spiers would ever come back to Bonny Unst. And so it was, for their boat was found bottom up at Fetlar, but their bodies were never found.’

How did Mr. Grubb like that story? Yes! he liked it very much. It made his flesh creep. He wondered why ghosts so seldom talked. Why, for instance, John Jameson, like an honest ghost, couldn’t have spoken to his wife, and said something kind to her, instead of going dripping about the house.

‘I quite agree with you,’ said Major Plunger, jumping up out of his sleep; ‘dripping in a house is a very nasty thing. Puts me in mind of a story I heard in Ireland, when we were aiding the police in suppressing illicit stills.’

‘What was the story?’ said Mr. Grubb. ‘Let’s have it.’

‘Well,’ said Major Plunger, ‘I’m a bad hand at telling a story, and I am very sleepy into the bargain; but this is my story:

‘We were up in Connemara, in the wildest part of the country I ever saw, and we were ordered to go to a farm-house, the owner of which was supposed to be a smuggler, and everything that is

bad. He looked a regular ruffian, I must say; but though we might have hanged him on the evidence of his face, which would certainly have turned king's evidence against him, we could find out nothing else, though we ransacked house, and haggard, and barn. We even turned up a dunghill to see if the still was not hidden in it, but it was nowhere to be found!

'All the while we were searching, Tim Doolan, who owned the ugly face, was standing by, cutting jokes, and laughing at us.

"Work wid a will, boys," to our men and the police; "sure it's nigh to it you are now!" Be gorra, you find it immadiately."

'But we never found it, and the men got sulky and tired.

"No good losing your timper," said Tim, "if you be after losing that, and don't find the still, you'll be badly off."

'Then as they were turning up the dunghill:

"Now do spare that," he said; "sure it's the only improvement my father left me, and that dungheap is all my capital."

'But for all that over it went.

"Well done, boys," said Tim; "now be asy while I tell you the hithory of that dunghill. It's an hithorical dunghill every way, at least in this part of the country. Is there any of you now that

knows where that dunghill stood before, and what it stood over?"

'Of course no one could tell. Besides what was the good of knowing where a dunghill stood, and what it stood over.

"Well," said Tim, "I'll enlighten yer. That dunghill is one of our antiquities. It was first built by my great-grandfather, not so long after the battle of the Boyne—bad luck to it! It was a grand dunghill to look at entirely, though you wouldn't think so to look at it now after you have mauled it about. Well! be gorra, not so long after my great-grandfather built it up, one day he was smoking as it may be here, thinking whether he should do anything at all that day but smoke, and saying to himself, "That's a grand dunghill of mine;" when all at once he saw a little old man by his side in old-fashioned clothes, and with a red peaked hat on his head.

"Good morning, Tim,"—my great-grandfather was called Tim, as I am; we are all Tims.

"Good morning, Tim," says the old man.

"The same to you, sir," says my great-grandfather. "Sorry I don't know your name."

"Never mind my name, Tim," says the old man. "It's not that I've come to spake about."

"What is it thin?" says my great-grandfather, getting quite fond of him like.

“ ‘It’s about that nasty dunghill.’ ”

“ ‘Nasty dunghill,’ says my great-grandfather. “ ‘Why you ould thief of the world, there isn’t a grander dunghill in all Connemara; look how it steams, as the rain falls on it. That dung is too good to put on any field. It shall always stay where it is.’ ”

“ ‘It shan’t,’ said the old man, getting quite red with rage—as red as his own hat.

“ ‘It shall,’ said my great-grandfather.

“ ‘It shan’t,’ said the old man again. “ ‘You’ll be sorry for this, Tim Doolan.’ ”

“ ‘No, I shan’t,’ said my great-grandfather, and he was so mad that he just turned round to fetch a stick to bate the ould man who had insulted his dunghill, but lo! when he turned to look for him the ould fellow was gone.

“ ‘Ould spalpeen,’ said my great-grandfather, “ ‘to insult my dunghill!’ ”

‘ So saying he went indoors, and smoked all the rest of the day, for he was too angry to work.

‘ Well, next day he couldn’t work a bit, not for anger, but for the rheumatism. One of the pigs, chasing the others over the dunghill, fell down and broke its neck; the milk wouldn’t churn; the potatoes wouldn’t boil; in fact, nothing went right in the house.

‘ This went on for a week or more, but the first.

fine day my great-grandfather hobbled out with the rheumatism on him, and thought of the butter, and the potatoes, and the pig, and last of all he thought of his dunghill.

“ I wonder, now,” he said to himself, “ what that ould vagabond came to say, and why he wanted the dunghill moved. Maybe it had something to do with my calamities.”

“ Av course it had, Tim Doolan !” said the old man, who seemed to rise out of the ground at my great-grandfather’s elbow as soon as ever he thought of him. “ Av course, it had ; and, mind yer, behave better this time, or worse will come of it.”

‘ To tell you the truth, my great-grandfather was quite afraid of the old fellow, though he scarce reached up to his waist. So he took off his hat, made him a low bow, and said : “ I’d like to have the honour of knowing your reverence’s name.”

“ Don’t you be after calling me reverence, Tim Doolan,” said the old fellow, “ because I’m not of your religion, but of one much oulder still.”

“ Well ! your honour ?”

“ That’ll do very well, Tim Doolan ; and now I’ll tell you what I came about. I’m the King of the Fairies in these parts, and my palace is just under this yard, and you have gone and built

that nasty dunghill right over my head, and all the muck and mess drains through it, and drips down on my table, so that we can't get a bit to ate that isn't full of dung, and that's what I came to-spake to you about the other day, and to beg you to move the dunghill; and if you move it, all shall go well with you and yours, and you shall always keep your land; and if you don't, why, you'll have more rheumatism, and lose more pigs, and have no butter and no potatoes. Do you understand me, Tim Doolan, and are you after-bating me with a stick this time, for all you have the rheumatism?"

"Do yer think I'd be after bating your honour?" said my great-grandfather. "The dunghill shall be moved from over your majesty's head as soon as ever I can handle a fork. Maybe, as your majesty knows everything, you know when I shall lose my rheumatism?"

"When you get up to-morrow morning, Tim Doolan, it shall be gone. But remember the dunghill!"

"He was gone again before my great-grandfather knew how he went; but he kept his word, and moved the dunghill to where it now stands, and that's why I said it was an histhorical dunghill, and whether you knew where it stood before it stood where it now stands."

“ And did your great-grandfather lose his rheumatism ? ”

“ Yes, be gorra, he did ; and the whole family have prospered and done nothing ever since ; and as for their dunghill, there it stands, and there it shall stand ; and the only stroke of work I’ll do this week will be to build it up again as grand as it was before, as soon as ever your backs are turned.”

‘ A capital story, Major ! ’ said Mr. Grubb. ‘ But it is getting late, Anna Maria dear ; we must be going home. The carriage is ready, no doubt. What a comfort that we have a good moon to find our way through the park ! ’

So the Grubbs’ carriage came, and they departed, and then we all went off to bed. Did I dream of passion-flowers or of dunghills ? Who can tell ?

CHAPTER IX.

GRATEFUL FEELINGS.

NEXT morning, very early, the Count, Major Plunger, Mr. Twentyman, Colonel Chichester, and I, went out shooting. The Count was a very good shot,—in fact, we were all very good shots, and the birds suffered a good deal. Somehow or other, too, partridges are much wilder now than they were when I was young. Perhaps I am a little older, and not quite so quick ; but still I think no one will deny that they are wilder. They feel the effects of modern society as well as the rest of the world. We are all of us wilder, no doubt. I suppose they are more shot at, have less time to rest, are less domestic, and, in fact, more on the wing. Where are now the bags that we made in 183-? Nowhere, as far as I can tell. But this is not a lamentation over the decrease of partridge or game in general. Let us get on.

When we got down to breakfast we found all the ladies,—yes, even Mary Harbury, looking, as

Mr. Twentyman said, 'as fresh as paint.' All the better for her bath, I should have said.

As soon as she saw me she came up and thanked me so prettily that it made quite a little scene. 'How could she ever repay me? Had it not been for me, she must have been drowned. She was just beginning to think it was all over. The sound of water was in her ears when she felt a strong arm clutch her, and turn her towards the bank. She knew nothing more till she found herself stretched on the grass.'

'Yes, indeed, Mary,' said Aunt Mandeville, 'you ought to feel grateful to Edward, and so, I am sure, will your mamma. As for me, I am quite proud of him. How odd it is that just there the river divides the properties! You fell in from our bank, and were dragged on shore on yours.'

Poor Aunt Mandeville! I knew what she was thinking of. In her mind's eye she saw the Avon effaced, and both the properties rounded off; and she saw me standing at the altar in Harbury Church, with Mary Harbury by my side; and she heard, with the ears of her mind, Mr. Pursey, the rector of Harbury, pronouncing the nuptial benediction in his snuffling voice.

Poor Aunt Mandeville! I say again.

When Mary Harbury's demonstrations were over we had time to think of other things.

‘Did you sleep well, Count Manteuffel?’ asked Auntie, with something like an anxious voice.

‘Very well, indeed,’ said the Count; ‘I did not even dream of the White Lady; and as for fairies and witches, they kept away from me. How did you sleep, Major?’

‘Oh,’ said the Major, ‘I did not sleep very well at first. I fancy there was some green in the tea. I tossed about a long while, and, as always happens, just as I was getting well into my sleep, it was time to get up.’

No one asked Mr. Twentyman how he had slept. It is well known that a Cornet of Heavy Dragoons always sleeps well, except when on duty, then they are as wakeful as dragons.

It was again too hot to shoot in the middle of the day, so the rest of the men played billiards, and I went up to write letters. Letters do I say? The excuse was letters, but I felt the poetic fury coming on me after the cold bath of yesterday forenoon, and the warm bath under the Passion-flower in the afternoon. Besides, had I not those silver beads to give to Arethusa? So I sat down and wrote off some verses to Arethusa. These were the first stanzas; the rest, I am sorry to say, are too warm for publication, though I assure you there was no harm in them.

TO MY MISTRESS,

WITH TWELVE SILVER BEADS.

‘ Go forth, ye twelve, so fair and bright,
Go guard my mistress through the night ;
And tell the sunshine of my soul
How slow the weary hours roll
Till she return to give me light ;
For love is blind save in her sight.

‘ Hang two by two on either arm,
Cling close and bind her with a charm ;
Ye shining spheres of silver twist,
Clasp tight for me each dainty wrist,
Shut up her sleeve and keep her warm ;
Go, hold my darling free from harm.

‘ Breathe with her as she draws her breath,
List to the beating of her heart,
Feel every joy, share every smart,
And should she doubt my perfect faith,
Say he is constant e’en to death.’

The rest you cannot have.

There ! I have a melancholy pleasure in writing those few verses out. Mummy poetry, dug out of the catacombs of the memory. Do they still glow with the pulsation of my young heart ? One thing more, do not say that I tell you no secrets. The secret of worming out a secret is not to ask for it. Leave it alone, it will work its way out to upper air. Moles and secrets are very much alike. I don’t mean moles on the skin, but moles in the

earth. Both must come up sometimes to breathe, and so these verses, kept a profound secret for so many years, have lain stored up in my memory, only to come out at last when every one whom they could offend is forgotten.

When I had written them out, and they seemed to flow from me naturally, I put them into a little parcel with the beads, which really were very pretty, and well worthy to be worn by Arethusa, and longed for an opportunity to give them to her. But how to do it was the difficulty. And how would she take them when they were given, that was quite another matter! However, I put them into my pocket, and like an idiot addressed them on the outside 'To my Mistress' in a large, round hand.

By this time, what with doubts, and difficulties, and hesitations of all sorts, not so much in the writing as in the way to present them, the bell for luncheon rang, and I went down, only to find that odious Madam Harbury *tête-à-tête* with Aunt Mandeville, overflowing with gratitude towards me for saving her daughter.

Did you ever see a vinegar-cruet overflowing with oil, or milk, or honey? If so, you may have a conception of Madam Harbury's gratitude. The vinegar-cruet was a vinegar-cruet still inside, but outside it was covered with patches of oil, that would

not mix at all with its sour nature. So it was with Madam Harbury; she was brimfull of gratitude, but yet her thanks had a dash of sourness.

‘Think what it would have been if Mary had been drowned, and not been regenerate. I care nothing for her body; it is her immortal soul that gives me deep concern. I am thankful to say that I have every reason to believe that Mary has listened to the call that comes to every one; and that even had Mr. Halfacre, humanly speaking, of course, not rescued her, she would have been saved in a far higher sense than he has saved her. What is life, dear Mrs. Mandeville, but a sea of troubles? Happy those who cross the sea soonest. They escape much misery. After all then, though I feel deeply thankful that Mr. Halfacre, under Providence, has been the means of saving my child’s life, I am not so sure that it is really for Mary’s good that she should have escaped this danger. Now her soul is safe, who can tell whether it will be as safe five, or ten, or twenty years hence?’

‘Dear Mrs. Harbury,’ said Aunt Mandeville, ‘you really must excuse me for saying that I think you are quite wrong. Mary is a dear, good girl. I do not think you have any right to reason from what she is at present to what she may be some day or other. Surely, if we are told, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” we may

believe, on the other hand, that sufficient unto the day is the good thereof. Let us be content with the present, and do our duty in it, without any morbid fear of what may happen to us or our friends some day or other, which, after all, none of us may live to see.'

'Very true,' said Mrs. Harbury. 'If I were sure we are sent into the world to be content. Mr. Knagger, the eminent Nonconformist divine, thinks we are not. He says, in one of his tracts—which, oddly enough, I have here in my bag—that we are sent here in order that we may be purified by the fire of adversity, and come out as fine gold from the melting-pot, before the throne of the Lamb. See here is the tract: "No Rest for God's Saints on Earth. Two Hundredth Thousand." Would you like to have it?'

'No, thank you, not at all,' said my Aunt. 'I am a sound member of the Church of England. I dislike Nonconformist divines and religious enthusiasm generally. Our good Mr. St. Faith is my model clergyman, and I like him all the more because he is weak in the pulpit and strong out of it.'

'Alas! alas!' said Mrs. Harbury. 'How true it is that moderation is the downward path. Mr. Knagger also proves this in another tract on Temperance, where he works out, beyond all possi-

‘Very true; but who raised up Mr. Halfacre, Mary?’

I felt very much inclined to say, ‘Aunt Mandeville, and very nicely she has done it;’ but that would have been profane, and Madam Harbury would only have gone on to ask who raised up Aunt Mandeville; so I said nothing, but looked at the pair.

‘But mayn’t I be thankful to Mr. Halfacre at all?’ said Mary, with something like a pout. ‘I suppose I mustn’t, as, according to you, he had so little to do with my rescue.’

‘Of course, you ought to be grateful to Mr. Halfacre, Mary, and so am I,—that is to say, if this rescue is for the good of your immortal soul, which, after all, is the only part of us worth a moment’s thought; but what I meant was, that we are not to forget the Creator in His works, and that we must look up first to God, and then down on Mr. Halfacre, who was merely an instrument to carry out His eternal purpose.’

Here was a pleasant mother-in-law to look forward to, who looked on the man who had saved her daughter’s life as though he were one of the Humane Society’s drags, and who could so freeze up her own child in this over-Christian way.

It would have done your heart good to see dear Aunt Mandeville while this edifying scene was

going on. There she sat, with her hands folded, in a state of suspended animation, as it seemed; but I knew if there were ever two souls more unlike than those two, you would have to go far to find them.

Aunt Mandeville always tried to do her duty after her light. She was the sworn foe of all irreligion and excess, but she was not so very fond of heaven that she did not think life worth living for. 'Let us do our best here,' she used to say, 'and trust to God for what is to come.' The other woman was so painfully morbid that she fled from the present to the future; and living always in a false light, she could not bear the light of everyday life. Besides, she was of that self-crucifying spirit, that she was afraid of being happy, lest it should be wrong. Such women are the fair game of charlatans and pretenders to piety, such as I verily believe, was that eminent Nonconformist, by whom Madam Harbury swore — the Rev. Jabez Knagger.

But all this time we have forgotten our luncheon. You must recollect, however, that those things take much longer to write than to happen. It is possible, we all know, to say a good deal more than you can write in five minutes. After all, we were not much more than ten minutes late at that meal.

Fortunately Madam Harbury was very hungry, and for a while her mouth was stopped to religious controversy, else no one can say what might have befallen the unhappy Twentymen, who sat next her.

I sat next to Mary Harbury. Yes, I did it from policy, with a quiet sparkle of the eye to *Arethusa*, which was accepted by the same telegraphic process. Mary had rather risen in my estimation since her resistance to her mother just before. She was really grateful, too, and again thanked me.

‘Ah, but you must remember I was but a tool or an instrument. A rake or a pitchfork in the old miller’s hand would have served just as well, you know, if it had been predestined that you were to be saved.’

I am sorry to say that Mary Harbury here said something that sounded very much like ‘Fiddlesticks!’

‘What is that you say?’

‘I say I am not such a rigid Calvinist as mamma. Besides, if it was fated that I was to be saved by you, I accept my fate, and bow to it.’

I hope all you young ladies and gentlemen see what a pretty speech this was from Mary Harbury; and I only hope, if you ever are in that most humiliating position of owing your life to another

human being, you will be able to make such a pretty speech.

Of course I ought to have said, 'I bow to it, and accept it, too;' and, in Scotland, such a speech before witnesses would have made me and Mary Harbury man and wife. If you do not believe what I say, you had better not go to Edinburgh and try, or you will find what I say to be bitter truth. Why, if Mr. Brown goes into a shop with a young lady, and says, 'Send in a bottle of ess Bouquet, or any other essence, to Mrs. Brown,' that's a marriage. So beware.

We are not quite so bad in England, but still young men cannot be too careful of what they say; and had I made the speech I have mentioned, every mother with marriageable daughters in England would have said that I was morally bound to marry Mary Harbury. What did I do? I merely made the bow without the speech, and so remained a free man. Perhaps I just then felt that packet of verses burning in my pocket, and thought of Arethusa.

The Count was between Arethusa and Aunt Mandeville, and had small talk enough for both. It just seemed to me as though he paid Arethusa too much attention, but, after yesterday, I was not going to be jealous.

In the afternoon we were to shoot again,—that

was what the gentlemen had come for. Bird-slaughter and hare-murder, and nothing more. They were fulfilling their mission,—they had not come to make love. But I, who would have given anything for an excuse to stay behind with Arethusia under the Passion-flower, had to trudge about with the rest through the turnips, listening to questions of my bird and your bird, and whose bird it was that towered, and endless stuff of that sort.

How glad I was when the lengthening shadows ushered in the decline of day, and when Colonel Chichester confessed himself dead beat, and that he would be glad to go home.

At that time we were some way from the house, so I caught at the opportunity, and offered to go home with him, and show him the way, if the others, who were still keen after their sport, would only forgive me for being so rude as to leave them.

Oh, certainly they would forgive me; so I gave the Colonel my arm, and he hobbled off home.

The Colonel was what I call a direct man—he went straight at his point.

‘Very nice girl, Miss Harbury?’

‘Very,’ I replied.

‘Ought to be deuced obliged to you for her life.’

‘Oh, no; it was mere impulse.’

‘I daresay. That’s not the way women look at

these things. She's getting fond of you, mark my word.'

'More than I am of her,' said I, rather irritated at the turn the Colonel was taking. 'I say now what I said before: I think it very hard if a young man is not to do his best to pull a young woman out of the water without being expected to marry her afterwards.'

"Expected!" I never said that. I only say Miss Harbury is getting fond of you, and I can see your Aunt would be glad if you married her.'

'Then my Aunt will have to wait a long time, for I do not feel myself at all getting fonder of Miss Harbury.'

'Take my word for it, Halfacre, you'll have to do it. I've had some experience of these things. You can never let such a chance slip of rounding off both properties in a ring-fence.'

So here it was again; that horrid ring-fence haunting me everywhere. At home with my Aunt, and out shooting; when I was doing the charitable to a gouty old gentleman, all for the sake of his daughter, here was the ring-fence hedging me in on all sides.

I am afraid I thought an oath; in fact, I am not sure I did not actually utter it. If I did it flew away with the wind and was lost. Sterne seems to think that oaths go up to heaven; I don't

agree with Sterne, I think they go straight to hell, their native home, and there abide our coming. I do not forget though that hell is proverbially paved with good intentions, so perhaps bad wishes have no place there. But, whether I swore or not, what I said was this:

‘Do you know, Colonel Chichester, I think landed proprietors are too anxious for ring-fences. I cannot at all see why an estate should be worse off if it is square than if it is round. Tastes differ. I do not know that I should not prefer a long to a round estate. But then, it is true, I have no land of my own. My Aunt always says that Halfacre Hall, our own estate, is much better because it lies all in a ring-fence, but I don’t see it at all, and much prefer the entangled Mandeville property which runs into Harbury, just as the river runs, and that is anything but in a ring-fence.’

‘You’ll have to do it all the same,’ said the Colonel. ‘But here we are close to the Hall. Thank you so much for your arm. I wonder where Toosy is.’

Now could this benevolent old straightforward Colonel have chosen any subject more ingeniously fitted to torment me than this ring-fence; and there I had all the time my packet close to my heart addressed ‘To my Mistress.’

I, too, wondered where Toosy was, but she was nowhere to be found. How sanguine lovers are, and how unreasonable! There was I, as soon as I had kicked off my shooting-boots and clothed myself like a son of civilisation, pacing up and down the conservatory, wildly fancying that I was to have the same good luck to-day as yesterday; but six o'clock came, and no Arethusa. Just as I was beginning to give up all hope, in she dashed like a humming-bird among the blooms; but I might as soon have tried to catch a humming-bird with my hand. She was ever on the wing, flitting about to get two roses for Mary Harbury and herself. No sooner did I approach, off she went, as much as to say, 'No, Edward, not to-day,' and, at last, just as I thought I had caught her in a corner, in came Brooks calling out, 'Master Edward, Master Edward, Mrs. Mandeville desires to see you in the library.'

It was no good contending against fate, all the less if Brooks was her herald. So with a hasty 'Another day then, Arethusa,' I withdrew, and was ushered by Brooks into the library.

'All I wish to say, Edward, is that I am so pleased with what you did yesterday, that I have written to Sir Benjamin Bullion to have £20,000, which I have in what they call Consols, handed over to you. The stock will henceforth stand in your name. You know long ago I wished you to

be a girl, but now I am so glad to have a man in the family.'

'But, Auntie, why should you give me anything? I don't wish to have anything of my own, but to belong to you.'

'Don't be silly, Edward! the money will be of more use to you than to me, and, besides, you ought to have something of your own. You know you will have Mandeville Hall and all that I have when I die; but we are a long-lived family, and you may have to wait a long while. Take this, like a good child; in the meantime, if you wish to oblige me, behave well to Mary Harbury.'

I must say I felt inclined to say, 'May the £20,000 and Mary Harbury perish together, if I am to give up Arethusa;' but my Aunt was so kind and gentle, and meant it all so kindly, that I could only say, 'You are always too good to me, Auntie.' Then I gave her a kiss and went away.

That day we had Mr. St. Faith to dinner, and we found him a great comfort after Madam Harbury's Calvinism.

'Why, you're the talk of the country-side, Edward. Guy of Warwick and the Dun Cow are as nothing to you, and won't be for a week. Things go fast, too,' he added in a much lower tone; 'it is already whispered over all the teapots in twenty parishes that you and Miss Harbury are

as good as man and wife. Well, she is a good girl, and well brought up in spite of Madam Harbury. You're a lucky fellow, and then, too, what an advantage to the estate; why, Harbury and Mandeville will then be in a ring-fence.'

Now, had I sworn outright, don't you think I should have been justified? Here was our most respected friend, the man who had known me man and boy for fifteen years, combining with all the old gossips in the county to make me over to Mary Harbury, and destroy my dearest hopes. As the man who having said he was going to America, only went because he would have had to write so many letters to say that he had not gone, so I, in spite of myself, might be forced by public opinion to marry Mary Harbury. Nay, I was worse than that man. He had said he would go, but I had never given any one the slightest reason to believe that I had any intention to marry Mary Harbury. And then, that ring-fence, and the advantage to the estate, is there anything that more completely proves the hold land has on us in England when we become slaves to it in this way, belonging to it rather than it to us?

Mr. St. Faith's well-meant praise threw such a chill over me that I could say nothing all dinner. Not Mr. Twentyman himself could have been more taciturn; nor John the Silentiary, about whom

you, of course, all know everything. I presume on your knowledge? Well, that is better than presuming on your ignorance. If one had to turn aside at every step, to bring up your knowledge in literary history, this sad story of mine would never come to an end.

Be content, therefore, to know that I was as taciturn as Twentyman, and as silent as John the Silentiary—silent as a fish, if you like that better. No one but the immortal Briggs ever heard that ‘mute race’ utter anything. Oh! that Briggs and the dear delightful John, who sketched him and created him, may now be roaming together over some happy hunting-grounds, scared by no cock pheasants, and worried to death by no organ-grinders and unsympathetic neighbours!

I must tell you that, after dinner, Arethusa and I and Mary Harbury made a solemn league and covenant to have some fun. We were supposed to be doing some music, but we only used the notes to hide our voices. Major Plunger snored as usual, bringing down bird after bird with each barrel in his dreams; the Count and Mr. St. Faith talked to Aunt Mandeville, and Colonel Chichester and Mr. Twentyman listened, and said nothing.

CHAPTER X.

OUR LEAGUE AND COVENANT.

WHILE the Count was making himself very amusing to my Aunt, quite getting the length of her foot, as Colonel Chichester said next morning, we drew up our solemn league and covenant.

I must tell you that Arethusa had already got out of me the whole story of the White Lady. She was a young woman of penetration, saw there was some mystery, set her heart on mastering it, and succeeded.

Need I say—though women can keep secrets better than any one else—better than men I mean,—that Arethusa considered this an open secret, and told it to Mary Harbury on one of her visits of condolence the day before. As soon as she left me in the conservatory—flying, in fact, from my Aunt's angry eye—she went straight up to Mary Harbury, and told her all about the White Lady, wisely keeping her own particular secret, that between herself and me, locked, as the novelists say, 'in the penetralia of her bosom.'

How delightful it is to a woman to go and tell another woman a secret, and yet to keep another, much more interesting to that woman, behind! No doubt my confession made Arethusa much more inclined to be good friends with Mary Harbury. Nothing is so bad for friendship as fear. As soon, therefore, as Arethusa ceased to fear Mary Harbury, she felt her heart open to her—all, except that little corner where our secret lurked.

Now, Mary Harbury had before heard something of the White Lady at Mandeville Hall, but without any details. She was grateful, therefore, to hear all about it lying in bed.

‘But do you believe it, dear?’ she asked of Arethusa.

‘Believe it, Mary! No, not at all,’ said Arethusa, scornfully. ‘What an insult to ask a young lady of the nineteenth century, a child of the time, if she believes in such nonsense!’

‘Yes, dear; but the Bible believes in them,’ said Mary, ‘and so we ought to believe in them, too.’

‘Well,’ said Arethusa, obstinately, ‘I do believe in the Bible,—at least, I try to do so. Though some of it is very hard to understand; and I don’t believe in ghosts.’ Having said this, she shook her head, and stamped a foot as tiny as a mouse.

If you ask me how I know what the two girls

talked about as Mary Harbury lay there, I answer, Arethusa told me some of it, and I guessed the rest. Don't say I invented, for I knew Arethusa so well, and my heart beat so much in unison with hers, that I seemed to know as well what she would do or say, under any given conditions, when she was away from me as when she was by my side.

Now, after dinner, Arethusa proposed to me a piece of wickedness. Observe that it was here, as with the apple, a woman was the tempter. If you are a woman, you may say you had rather be a tempter than an idiot, as Adam was, and I hasten to disarm your wrath by saying that I am on your side. All I say is, that Arethusa first proposed the plot, that Mary Harbury seconded it, and that I had the resolution to follow them.

'Let us,' said Arethusa, in a deep whisper—
'let us dress up Mary Harbury to-morrow night when the September moon will be at the full, and let us frighten that lemon-haired Count, and see if he is really as little afraid of ghosts as he pretends to be.'

'Yes, let us,' said Mary Harbury.

'Yes, let us,' said I; and the compact was made, and we were all sworn to secrecy by a formula of nods and smiles.

How Mary Harbury's face lighted up at the thought, and how pleased she was that Arethusa

took so much notice of her. Poor thing! she little knew that the cause of Arethusa's graciousness was the triumph that every woman feels in winning a man's heart to herself. It is so easy to be good and gracious on the field of conquest with the shout of victory ringing in our ears.

Next morning after breakfast, we all three met in the conservatory under the Passion-flower. That was our trysting-tree. As I stood under it, I felt how much the flower could tell if it could speak, and how much we two knew which Mary Harbury did not know. This is that irony of love which makes it so sweet. To seem to every one but the loved object to be doing or saying things which, except to him or to her, have a different sound and meaning than meets the common ear and sense. That Passion-flower was quite another passion-flower to Arethusa and to me than it was to Mary Harbury. It was transfigured in our hearts with a glory not its own; but to Mary it was merely a beautiful passion-flower, and nothing more.

‘Now,’ said Arethusa, ‘Mary and I will go into the Hall and have a good look at the White Lady. Why I said that we would dress you, dear, was because, though it’s not flattering to compare you to a ghost, you are more pale than I am, and, with a little powder, will be much more ghostlike

than I. Your nose, too, is like; and as for your eyes—yes, they will do very well. Let us see if you can put on a rueful countenance, though you'll never look half so doleful as she does in the picture.

'I'm sure I can't tell,' said Mary; 'but if I only look half as doleful as I felt when I fell into the water, I'm sure I shall look more woe-begone than any ghost.'

Off to the hall, then, we went. Colonel Chichester was there, but he soon moved off when he saw us looking at the pictures. He did not care much for it, and he had long ago heard all about the Mandeville ancestors. So we had the hall to ourselves. By great good luck the Count and Major Plunger had agreed to go off to Coventry for the day to look after those everlasting remounts, so we were, in fact, in luck's way; and, after the girls had taken a good look at the White Lady, they retired to Arethusa's room, locked the door to keep out their maids, and fell hard at work making the White Lady's clothes. She was simply clad in a white silk skirt of a soft material,—taffeta or something of the sort,—and she wore a white wimple and a string of pearls round her neck. It so happened that Mary Harbury had a string of pearls, so that the ghost's toilet was soon made.

I was just going out to shoot with Twentyman,

the taciturn;—poor fellow, he was as good as gold; though he was so silent, and, as he cared for nothing but shooting, I was glad to do him this good turn,—I was just going out with him I say, when I heard Arethusa and Mary running down the staircase, at our end of the Hall, laughing as merrily as two jays in a wood. Mary leant over the balustrade, and called out:

‘It does beautifully, Mr. Halfacre.’

Whether Twentyman thought anything of this speech I cannot say, at any rate he made no remark about it, except in an absent way, ‘How loud those girls laugh!’

When we came back from shooting Arethusa and Mary were sitting as demure as cats in Aunt Mandeville’s room, and Mrs. Grubb was paying a visit, and saying how neither Mr. Grubb nor she could get a wink of sleep the night they dined at the Hall, because of those horrid ghost stories.

‘That’s a good joke, Mrs. Grubb,’ said I; for it was Mr. Grubb himself who made us tell them. ‘After all, I don’t think they were so very horrid.’

‘What! not that nasty, dripping story of yours about the “Three Fishermen of Unst,”’ said Mrs. Grubb. ‘I think you must have made it out. I have hunted in the Gazetteer, and I can’t find any such place as Unst in England.’

‘Very likely not, for Unst is not in England, but in Scotland. You will not find it in an “English Gazetteer,” but you can read a long account of it in the “New Statistical Account of Scotland.”’

‘Dear me, I had forgot,’ said Mrs. Grubb; ‘but, account or no account, I don’t believe one word of it.’

‘Then why couldn’t you sleep?’

‘Because Mr. Grubb would toss about so, and groan. Once he woke up, and swore he saw Tim Doolan in the room, and wanted me to turn him out. Fancy that.’

‘Very hard indeed, Mrs. Grubb, that you should have to turn persons out of your room whom you only know by hearsay, and very wrong of Mr. Grubb to ask you to do it.’

‘Just as I think,’ said Mrs. Grubb, who had by this time rubbed and rumpled the chintz of her chair into the highest pitch of irritation. ‘But I must be off home, or Mr. Grubb will be thinking that I have become a ghost, or something of the kind.’

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHITE LADY.

WE three conspirators against the Count were like little children all that afternoon. We clung together, to my Aunt's delight, who saw, in our taking to Mary Harbury, an earnest for the future. Up and down the house we went, along the galleries, into the chapel, then out on the terrace, wondering if we should succeed in frightening him.

At last Arethusa said, 'It's all very well talking of frightening him, but it's very like the old story of belling the cat. How shall we do it?'

'Why,' said Mary, 'you know I am to be the White Lady; and so, when they are all in bed and asleep, I will slip out of my room into yours, and when we come out into the gallery, on our side of the house, Mr. Halfacre must meet us. Then we will all steal downstairs into the hall, and across it, and up the other staircase to their wing, and then ——'

'Go on,' said Arethusa. 'What then?'

‘Why, then,’ said Mary, ‘we must all go into the Count’s room, and frighten him.’

‘Ghosts don’t go about like French policemen,’ said Arethusa, ‘two by two. I never heard of a double ghost, or twin ghosts; still less of three ghosts together,—human nature wouldn’t bear it. We can’t all go in together.’

‘How then shall it be?’ said Mary; ‘for frighten him we will.’

‘This is what I think,’ said Arethusa. ‘You must go in alone, and Mr. Halfacre and I will stand outside, close to the door. All you have to do is to walk round the room very slowly, and to wring your hands at his bedside. You must carry a taper, or else he won’t see you.’

‘Do ghosts carry tapers?’ said Mary. ‘Where do they get them?’

‘How silly you are!’ said Arethusa. ‘There are no such things as ghosts. If there were they could carry tapers just as easily as they carry their own heads, as some of them are supposed to do. You must carry a taper, dear; for the very good reason that if you don’t, the Count won’t be able to see you. By rights, the moon ought to shine into the room, as it always did in the old uncomfortable times, when our ancestors had no curtains, blinds, or shutters. But we can’t trust to the moon; nor to his

having a night-light; and so, as I have said before, it all comes to this, you must carry a taper.'

'Well!' said Mary, 'to please you, I'll carry a taper. I suppose it ought to have a long winding-sheet, hanging down on one side; but to tell you the truth, I don't think it right to go into the Count's room.'

'Nothing venture, nothing have,' said Arethusa. 'You want to frighten him, just for the fun of the thing, and you won't go into the room of an old man like that because you are afraid. Shan't we be outside, and ready to help you? Take my word for it, he'll be too frightened to stir.'

Oh, Arethusa! an old man like that; why, Count Manteuffel was not more than thirty; how could you call him old?

'Well,' said Mary Harbury, 'not to spoil sport, I'll give in; but mind and stand close to the door; and if you hear the least noise, rush in, and protect me.'

So it was settled that Mary was to play the ghost, and to go into the Count's room; and that we were to give her all the help we could.

'Don't you think, Miss Harbury,' I said, as the afternoon wore away, 'that it would be as well if you tried on the ghost's dress in your own

room, so as to make sure that you have it all right?’

‘A very good thought,’ said Mary; and away she skipped up the staircase—light-hearted thing that she was!—and I was left alone with Arethusa.

Now, of course, was the time to have presented my beads with the verses. Can you tell me why I did not do it? Had I known as much then as I know now, I should have presented them on the spot. Most men have one chance of doing anything in life; some are so lucky as to have two. Few have more. My advice, therefore, to young men and women, is to make the most of any chance they may have, lest they should not have another.

But though I felt them burning at my side, I had not courage enough to give Arethusa the packet. All I said was:

‘Arethusa! I admire you more than ever. You could persuade Mary Harbury to do anything.’

‘No pretty speeches, Edward, if you please,’ said Arethusa. ‘I believe you love me, and that is enough. I return your affection, but I desire no compliments. I daresay, now, you think me very selfish in making Mary Harbury play the ghost, and go into the Count’s room, which, after all, *is* a very strange thing for a young lady to

do. Shall I tell you why I don't play the ghost myself?'

'No doubt you have a very good reason; what is it?'

'Listen, then. Of course, after the play has been played out, and the Count frightened, every one in the house will hear of it, and your Aunt will be very angry. At the bottom of her heart, I feel that she believes in the White Lady, and she will think it a great breach of politeness to frighten the Count; but she will be much less angry with Mary Harbury than with any one else, because I can see that she gets fonder and fonder of Mary, while she likes me less and less.'

'What will Colonel Chichester say?'

'Oh, Papa! Papa will be angry at first; but he is so kind, that when I put my arms round his neck and give him a kiss, it will be forgiven and forgotten.'

Why did I not give Arethusa the beads then and there, and treat her in the same way as she promised to treat her father? You are trying to find out what I did. Have I not told you that you are not to know everything? All I say is, that whatever I did, I did nothing more than I had done under the Passion-flower, and that I did not give Arethusa the beads because it is only possible to do one thing at a time, and

because I was so happy that I forgot the verses and the beads altogether.

You see you can get nothing out of me either by direct questions or suggestions. I am too wary. Love secrets are always secrets. Even the interval of a quarter of a century is no excuse for betraying them.

Soon after the Count and Major Plunger came back. I forgot to say that Colonel Chichester and Mr. Twentyman were playing billiards all the afternoon. They had a very successful day at the fair; and though the Major would go on growling about the price of horseflesh and foreign buyers, it was plain that he, too, had made some good bargains for the Colonel of his regiment.

‘Famous chestnut mare that your Adjutant bought,’ I overheard the Count say; ‘such a galloper! I daresay she would go well across country.’

‘Like your brown horse better,’ was Major Plunger’s reply. ‘But what a price you gave for him; seventy guineas for a troop-horse in a country fair! What a regiment it must be if all your troopers are mounted like that!’

‘We want to get up a regiment that could ride down Wallmoden’s Heavy Dragoons,’ was the Count’s reply.

‘Who is Wallmoden?’ asked Major Plunger,

with that serene ignorance of military history which then distinguished, and, for aught I know, still distinguishes, the British officer.

‘Too long a story to tell,’ said the Count; ‘but Wallmoden’s Heavy Dragoons are a heavy Austrian cavalry regiment, who are said to be able to ride over everything. We Prussians want to see if we can’t some day or other ride over them.’

‘Wish you luck,’ said Major Plunger.

How long ago this was I don’t care to remember; but you will all see,—that is to say, if any of you are not as distinguished for your ignorance of military history as Major Plunger,—that the luck which he wished Count Manteuffel came to the Prussian cavalry in the year 1866.

This was not very lively conversation, but we were none of us lively that evening. The three conspirators were reserving their strength for their midnight campaign, and if we could have done so with any decency, we would all have availed ourselves of that glorious privilege of youth, I mean that of going to sleep at all hours. As that could not be, we remained in a state of torpor in our easy chairs, like bears, or dormice, or squirrels, just before their fit of winter sleep seizes them. But I laughed to myself, and laughed loud in one of my lucid intervals, to see Arethusa as still as a mouse and Mary Harbury blinking with half-shut

eyes, biding the weird hour when she was to trip across the hall as the White Lady.

The Count, as usual, talked to Aunt Mandeville, getting more and more the length of her foot, to use the vulgar phrase of Major Plunger. I really believe she began to regard him as one of the true Mandeville stock, which she was ever ready to praise, except when it was pitted against the Halfacres. Then the struggle between Saxon and Norman was revived, and she hated Mandeville when she remembered she was a Halfacre. Mere upstarts, those Normans, coming into a country where they were aliens and seizing other people's land. What was Doomsday Book to the Halfacre Charter centuries before the battle of Hastings? But putting her own family out of the question, she was quite ready to admit that the Mandevilles were of gentle blood, and that they had done more in English History than the Halfacres, who, though I say it, seem to me to have merely vegetated in Warwickshire ever since the days of Alfred.

But as the Count knew nothing of the Halfacres, and only claimed kin with the Mandevilles, Auntie was ready to talk to him on family history by the hour.

Colonel Chichester, Major Plunger, and Mr. Twentyman, were as silent and attentive as usual.

How true it is that many people are sent into the world merely as stuffing and packing for the few that have brains, to keep them warm and safe, and, above all things, to prevent great wits from coming too close to each other, lest they should clash and do one another harm!

‘Candles, Edward,’ said Aunt Mandeville, at last. ‘You are all sleepy, saying and doing nothing. If one is to be idle, better be idle in bed.’

This denunciation of sloth sent us all off. Those were not the days of smoking-rooms, except in taps and taverns. Of course, now-a-days, the gentlemen would have retired to brandy and soda-water and smoke; they would have thrown off their dress-coats and put on capes and wrappers; they would have drawled and drivelled till two or three o’clock in the morning. Major Plunger would have been as somnolent, except that he would have had a cigar in his mouth; Mr. Twenty-man as taciturn, with the same difference; Colonel Chichester would have occasionally uttered ‘Very true;’ Count Manteuffel for him have said very little; I should have listened, and when we had been thoroughly smoked out we should all have crept lazily up to bed.

No man now gets his beauty sleep, and that’s what makes them all look so wan and washed out next morning. In the year 183— we went to bed

betimes, only smoked out of doors, or on coaches, or in inn-parlours, if we were ever so unfortunate as to enter one, and in my humble opinion we were much the better for it, and much better company next morning.

The gentlemen, therefore, on that memorable September night went to bed soon after the ladies. It was barely eleven; but as I saw the moonlight streaming through the painted glass of the hall-windows, and staining the stone pavement with the ruddy lozenges of the Mandevilles, I felt that this was the night above all nights in the year for the White Lady—the night of all others; the full moon in September that she was bound to appear if she ever meant to show herself.

Yes, there she looked down on us as we parted from the Count and the Heavies,—they turning short up their staircase, which, as you know, was the nearest to the drawing-room, and we going the whole length of the hall to ours.

As I passed the picture a strange sort of Don Juan-like feeling came over me, and I made her a low bow. By rights the picture ought to have winked, or smiled, or made some sign; but it made none. It only gazed on with its set face of unutterable woe. It said as plainly as any face could say: ‘Life is but vanity and vexation of spirit. I was once as gay and gladsome as you,

but see what it all comes to—grief, and misery, and woe.’

‘I never pass that picture that it doesn’t give me a turn,’ said the Colonel. ‘If it were mine I’d sell it, or part with it, or something.’

‘My Aunt would not part with it for anything. She keeps it there, she says, to remind us that life is not all play and pastime.’

‘I don’t understand such feelings,’ said the Colonel. ‘Dear me, how sleepy I am; but how bright the moon is: one sees it better here where there is no stained glass. Good night, Halfacre.’

‘Good night, Colonel,’ and we parted.

There I sat in my room, waiting for twelve to strike. I tried to read, but I might as well have tried hieroglyphics, the Rosetta Stone, or the Luxor at Paris, or Cleopatra’s Needle, which we English have never taken the trouble to bring over. It was all no use, there were the words and letters, but I could not understand them.

All at once I thought of my verses,—where were they? All safe in my coat-pocket. It is safest to carry one’s secrets always about one, as Indian princes carry their precious stones, so when I dressed for dinner, I put the packet into my coat-pocket, and when I went to bed, it lay under my pillow, and when I got up, it went into the breast-pocket of my morning coat. Yes! there it was all

safe, and I swore one of those empty lover's oaths that I would,—yes, I would—give the packet to Arethusa that very night while we were standing outside Count Manteuffel's room ready to rush in in case of need, and rescue Mary Harbury.

At last twelve struck, one, two, three, four, five, and so on.

We were not to go too soon. That had been arranged. 'Hurry no man's ghosts,' is a good maxim. It would have shown an indecent haste in the White Lady to begin to walk as soon as ever the clock struck. Just like Colonial people asked to a London crush, who will not wait till eleven has struck, but come at ten, before the ladies have left the dinner-table. No! ghosts have manners as well as the rest of us. The world of shadows has its social rules. One spirit says to another, when it invites it to a ball in a churchyard: 'Any time before daylight,' and unless it is expressly stated, 'Dancing Early,' no ghost of good family would show its skeleton face before one A.M.

We gave the White Lady law, therefore, and hoped the longer we waited the better chance there would be of frightening our victim.

At one o'clock I stole out, and as I opened my door true to the minute, Arethusa and Mary Harbury came out of hers; only two doors off. Auntie slept quite at the end of the gallery, next

to her was her maid, and next to the maid Colonel Chichester. Then came Arethusa's and Mary Harbury's maids together in one room,—that, you know, was before the days when every lady's maid on a visit expected to have a room to herself. Fortunately our rooms were nearest to the staircase, and except the snoring of one of the maids nothing was to be heard.

The moonbeams shone brightly into the gallery, and had we been sure that the Count's windows were free to let them stream in, there would have been no need of Mary Harbury's taper. She held it in her hand, however, and, I must say, looked the ghost to perfection, except that she had not put on her woe-begone face.

'That will come, dear,' whispered Arethusa to Mary; 'you'll be frightened when you are playing the ghost, and will look doleful enough. Mind you don't laugh. Come along.'

Downstairs we all crept, gliding softly,—as though we were ghosts indeed,—along the hall safely. But just as we were about to climb the opposite staircase, out came a gust of wind from behind the arras, and Mary Harbury's taper went out. There was moonlight enough, but for the reasons given the taper was a necessity.

'Stay here,' said Arethusa; 'I'll run back and light it again,' and her lissom form passed like a

snake along the pavement, patched and stained with moonbeams shining red and white till we saw it glided up the staircase.

It so happened that the taper went out just under the picture, of which Mary was a travesty, and as we dared not stir, we had to wait face to face with that ghostlike face, till Arethusa's return.

'I am so frightened, Mr. Halfacre,' said Mary. 'How long Arethusa is in coming!'

It really was not long at all. But in such a position minutes seem years.

It was a great relief to both of us to see Arethusa slowly coming down the staircase, taper in hand, carefully guarding it with the other.

'I'm so glad you are come,' said Mary; 'I'm so afraid.'

'Follow me,' said Arethusa, who knew this was no time for talk, and up the staircase she stole as softly as a mouse.

The White Lady's room, was nearly the last in the other gallery, and between us and it were Major Plunger's and Mr Twentyman's rooms.

As we passed the Major's we heard an unearthly noise. What was it? Only the Major answering by a deep hollow snore the challenge of the maid opposite. We all smiled and felt ashamed of being afraid, for if there be anything of this earth earthy, it is a good sound snore.

On we passed, and just before we reached the Count's door, we halted to give Mary the taper, and to prepare for the last act—that of invading the Count's rest.

But we had reckoned without our host, or, rather, without our Count. Just as we were all ready and Mary Harbury had put on her most doleful face, looking as though the tears were streaming down her cheeks, the Count's door was thrown wide open, and out rushed the Count *in propria persona*, in a state of attire rather hastily improvised.

Need I say that we all—ghost with the rueful countenance and all—turned and fled along the gallery? But the Count, or, as Arethusa called him, 'the old man of thirty,' was as nimble as a hare, and overtook Mary Harbury, who was last in the flight.

'I will teach you to play tricks upon strangers,' said the Count, as he seized her. 'Shameful!' as he recognised her; 'shameful, Miss Harbury, to disguise yourself so.'

By this time, seeing that Mary was caught, both Arethusa and I stopped, only to see the stolid face of Mr. Twentyman shining out of his half-opened door like the full moon which lit it up.

'What's all this row about?' he said.

'Nothing,' I replied; 'we were going to play

Count Manteuffel a trick, but he was too sharp for us and found us out.'

As soon as Mary saw Arethusa returning, she fled to her; and then the two, hand in hand, ran away down the gallery like roe-deer, and were soon in their own rooms.

And there I was left alone with the Count, who seemed strangely agitated, seeing that he had completely turned tables on us.

'Now they are gone,' he said, 'I must confess you fairly frightened me out of my wits; but the least said soonest mended.' And as he said that he went back into his room and locked the door.

'Very odd,' I thought, 'but I suppose I may as well go to bed too;' and with that I picked up Mary Harbury's taper, which she had let fall in her fright, and went back leisurely to bed.

I had sat up so late, and been so weary with expectation and excitement, that I slept till late next morning, and only came down to find prayers over and Aunt Mandeville by herself in the breakfast-room.

'What was all that noise in the house, I wonder, late last night?—a sound as of people scampering about, a rustling of gowns, a tripping up and down of feet along the galleries. I do wonder what it all was.'

I thought it best to make a clean breast of it at

once, and told my Aunt the whole story from beginning to end.

‘Very wrong and very silly, I must say; I’ve really no patience with any of you. And Mary Harbury, too, who would have thought she could be so bold as to think of dressing herself up, and to be on the very point of going into a gentleman’s bedroom? I never heard of anything so shocking. What will Mrs. Harbury say?’

‘I should think she would say nothing, if she were not told. After all, Auntie, you know it did not happen. We were only going to frighten Count Manteuffel, but he came out and frightened us.’

‘The impropriety is in the intention, Edward, and not in the act. The guilt is the same, so far as you are concerned, as if Mary had actually entered the Count’s room. It really was a mercy, though, that the Count came out when he did. It was very clever of him.’

Just as Aunt Mandeville had got so far in her denunciation of our folly, down came the Count and Major Plunger and Mr. Twentyman by one staircase, and Colonel Chichester and the two young ladies by the other.

I must say that Mary Harbury looked much more like a ghost by daylight than she did by night. I never saw any one so worn and wan in

the time. It was plain that, whoever had slept that night, she had not. As for Arethusa, she looked as well as usual, and evidently not at all ashamed.

Strange to say Count Manteuffel, who ought to have been wildly triumphant at having defeated the machinations of the enemy, looked almost as careworn as Mary Harbury. He, too, had passed a sleepless night.

As for Colonel Chichester and Major Plunger, they evidently knew nothing at all about what had happened.

We sat down to breakfast, we three conspirators waiting for the Count to begin; but, to our surprise, he said nothing. 'Very gentlemanlike of him, I'm sure,' I said to myself; 'he's going to take no notice of it. It's all no use, though, for Aunt Mandeville knows it all.'

At last Aunt Mandeville felt it time to speak. She thought some apology was due to her guest for the hoax that was to have been played upon him.

'It gives me great pain, Count Manteuffel,' she said, 'to think that you were nearly the victim of a silly hoax or trick, played upon you by these young people, who seem to have more cleverness than sense. Permit me to congratulate you on the determined way in which you met the enemy and

to apologise, in their name, for their misbehaviour. I am sure they will all join with me in making it.' 'Yes,' 'Yes,' 'Yes,' we three conspirators said, and then I added: 'It was a silly thing to think of, except among ourselves, and very glad I am that our scheme utterly failed.'

This I thought very handsome, and so my Aunt thought it, for she smiled most graciously on me. Of course we all thought that the Count would have been satisfied that all would be forgotten, or, if not forgotten, that the joke would have been against us, the conspirators.

To our great surprise, therefore, Count Mantuffel drew himself up with his Prussian stiffness, and speaking slightly between his teeth—his way when he was put out—said:

'I should be most happy to receive your apology, Mr. Halfacre, at once, and be most ready to say nothing about the matter, if the case were as you say. Then I should have had no right to say anything, with the laugh on my side; but how can I do this when I must confess that, for ten minutes at least, Miss Harbury played her part so well that she almost scared me out of my wits, and, in fact, so frightened me that I feel still quite shattered.'

The Count's speech seemed so ridiculous that I looked hard at him to see if he were sane.

‘You really must forgive me if I say that I do not understand what you mean. So far from Miss Harbury frightening you for ten minutes, I am sure we were not half-a-minute before your door, making up our minds to enter, when you rushed out and put us all to flight. It seems to me, if an apology is due to any one for being frightened, it is to these young ladies, and particularly to Miss Harbury, whose arm you clutched when you caught her, and who certainly was very much frightened.’

‘Making up your minds to enter my room!’ cried the Count in indignation; ‘why, Miss Harbury had entered it, and stayed in it, for ten minutes at least, and it was only when she left the room that I rushed out of bed, threw something round me, and followed her.’

‘Dear me,’ said Aunt Mandeville; ‘this is really dreadful.’ And then she turned quite white, as she always did when she was angry. In a moment she turned fiercely to me and said, ‘Edward, is this true, and have you told me an untruth?’

‘Indeed, Auntie, I have told you the whole story, from first to last, just as it happened. I thought it best to tell you before you heard of our silliness from any one else.’

‘Now did we,’ I added, turning to Arethusa

and Mary,—‘did we—did you, Miss Harbury—did any of us ever enter Count Manteuffel’s room?’

‘Of course not,’ they both exclaimed; ‘we were just going to turn the handle of the door when Count Manteuffel rushed out and we all ran away.’

‘Very strange—most strange,’ said Aunt Mandeville, with a sigh. ‘Perhaps, Count Manteuffel, as you say Miss Harbury entered your room last night, you will be good enough to tell us what happened after you went to bed?’

‘Most willingly,’ said the Count; ‘I shall be only too happy to help in explaining this mystery if I can. This is my story: I went to bed, as you all know, last night, and as I passed through the hall I was struck,—I believe as we all were,—with the brightness of the full moon. It was so lovely that when I went to bed I unclosed the shutters, drew up the blind, and looked out at the old oaks in the park. I did not even close the shutters or draw down the blind when I went to bed, and the moonbeams still streamed in.

‘I was tired with my day’s work at the fair and fell asleep at once, and how long I had been asleep I cannot say, but to judge by what happened afterwards, I should say about an hour, when I woke up with a start, and that vague sort of feeling that comes over one in bed, when there

is some one in the room, and we know it, though we have not yet set eyes on them.

‘Well, you all of you know the portrait of the White Lady. Too well I knew her. At first I could only see by the moonlight that there was some one moving about the room in the shadow, but in a moment it passed into the stream of moonlight, and there I saw the White Lady as plain as I see you. I lay still as death, and she came so close to the bedside that I could have touched her with my hand; but I could not see her face of woe so well then, because she was again in shadow.

‘There she stood wringing her hands for, I suppose, a minute; then she slowly moved away towards the dressing-room door and disappeared. I lay there, entranced as it were, making up my mind that it was necessary to do something, and yet not knowing what to do. It might be a hoax, then it was my duty to be still and do nothing; or it might be a sleep-walker, and then it was my duty to follow her gently and see that she took no harm. As I lay in doubt, and I must say alarm, she appeared again, again stepped to my bedside, again wrung her hands, and again glided away through the moonbeams into the shadow, and towards the door.

‘Then it was that I summoned up resolution to follow her, and then it was that in that state of

undress for which I am bound to apologise, I rushed out, chased you all down the gallery, and clutched Miss Harbury's arm. I am sorry that I hurt you so, Miss Harbury, but you must remember that until I overtook you I did not in the least know who you were.

'That is my story, and how it agrees with yours when you say that you never entered my room, it passes my comprehension to understand.'

'Mary Harbury never was in your room last night,' said Arethusa, in a voice that was awful from its seriousness and solemnity. 'Indeed I am not at all sure that we should ever have got her to go in; she was so frightened at last.'

'Dear me!' said Mary, 'and how frightened I was when Count Manteuffel gave me this mark!' and with that she bared her arm and showed, just below the elbow, the black score of five fingers and a thumb.

'Something like a grip,' said Major Plunger. 'How odd now that I should have slept through all this uproar, and never heard the least of it!'

'Who shall decide when authorities differ?' said Aunt Mandeville. 'I believe you both, that will be the best way. May I ask the Count whether your White Lady looked like Miss Harbury?'

'Not at all, except at a distance. When I

got out and saw the three I knew that I had been hoaxed, and so I gave chase; but I am bound to say that when I overtook Miss Harbury she was not at all like the White Lady, except that she was as pale as death and clad all in white.'

'Very strange,' said my Aunt. And so say I, and so you will say, reader; and if any of you can explain why Mr. Blogg, the judge of bristles, and Count Manteuffel, the polished gentleman and judge of horseflesh, both saw the same apparition after an interval of years at Mandeville Hall, I shall be very glad if you will do so. As for me, my duty is only to tell you facts which have come under my own knowledge.

All this time I daresay you have forgotten the silver beads, and those most unhappy verses. Where were they? I thought in my pocket, of course. I told you I always carried them about with me, and had it not been for the Count's absurd and unfeeling behaviour in rushing out on us, I certainly would, according to my oath, have presented them to Arethusa as soon as Mary Harbury had gone into his room.

Again, I say, where were they? Alas! in the safe keeping of Brooks.

Just as the talk about the ghost had dwindled down into the 'uncanny' feeling that there was

something in it which no one could explain, Brooks entered the room and said :

‘Something for you, missis, which Mary Jane found in the north gallery this morning.’

As ill-luck would have it I was not aware of what the old wretch was doing, or I would have jumped up and said : ‘That belongs to me, it fell out of my pocket last night,’ as was the very truth. But I was too late. Aunt Mandeville had already broken open the packet addressed ‘To my Mistress.’ Out fell the sheet of paper on which the verses were scrawled, and down on the table rolled the silver beads which I had destined for Arethusa.

‘What’s all this?’ said my Aunt.

‘Why, these are the beads you bought at Warwick, Halfacre,’ said the Major, wakeful out of season, and sharp-sighted as a cormorant.

‘Very pretty, Edward,’ said my Aunt. ‘Is this a present for me? and with some verses too, “*To my Mistress, with twelve silver beads.*” I can’t be your mistress, though I am mistress in this house.’

I know I ought to have demanded the verses and put them into my pocket. Until they were read they were nothing.

Had I said, ‘Only some silly stuff, Auntie, which fell out of my pocket in the ghost-hunt

last night, not worthy of your notice,' all would have been right; but like Count Manteuffel, who confessed himself shattered, fascinated, paralysed, call it what you will, as he lay in his bed in the awful presence of the White Lady, so I sat there never saying a word till all the harm was done, till Aunt Mandeville had read the verses twice through, with a flush of passion on her face, growing deeper as she read. 'Most improper,' was what she said; 'quite unlike the poetry of Cowper. What an insult to the object of your affections,—“your mistress,” as you call her! Pray, Edward! and who is your mistress?'

Could I have only answered as the man answered about his neighbour, 'She that showed pity on me,' it would have been a good answer, but even that would not have appeased Aunt Mandeville, who, what between the White Lady and the warm verses, was quite upset.

'I never heard of such things, Edward. Are these your Oxford manners? First, to go and persuade two young ladies, who while in this house are under my protection, to go and dress themselves up to frighten a guest in his bedroom, and then to pen such really shocking verses to some one who, I hope, for her sake as well as yours, is imaginary.'

Now, observe the delicacy of my position, and

my stupidity in not having given the verses at once to Arethusa. She might think the verses which Auntie called shocking intended for herself, and until she saw them she might, if she chose, think herself insulted. But even this was the least painful supposition. If she saw the verses, and, for the sake of what had passed between us, excused them on account of their beauty, all would be right. But suppose she chose to fancy that she was not the mistress for whom they were intended; that they were meant for Mary Harbury, for instance; and that while making love to her I was carrying on an intrigue with Mary Harbury, I knew not what would happen to me. In short, I was driven to distraction.

All I could do was to leave the room, and say, as I ought to have done at first, 'They are very silly stuff, I daresay, meant for no one, and with no meaning in them. Pray throw them into the fire.'

'And what am I to do with the beads?' cried out Aunt Mandeville. 'They were meant for some one, I suppose. Am I to throw them into the fire as well?'

To this I made no answer. I ran away into the open air, and was glad to go out shooting with the taciturn Twentyman.

'Tell you what, Halfacre,' he said, after knock-

ing over his twentieth bird, 'you'll get into a fine row about those verses if you don't take care.'

I slunk back to luncheon and ate it moodily, scarcely daring to look any of the ladies in the face. It was some comfort to think that no one had yet seen the verses but Aunt Mandeville, who had not thrown them into the fire, but retained them as a 'material guarantee.' I know this is a piece of political slang of after-years, an anachronism from the Crimean war; but if you ever write a book and don't make as bad, or worse ones, think yourself lucky, most captious reader.

After luncheon Auntie wanted to have a word with me, and I went off with her to her own room, like a little boy going to the dentist with his mother.

To my utter surprise Aunt Mandeville's wrath had almost entirely disappeared, but she only roused me up to dash me down again into the very depths of despair.

'These verses, Edward, though very warm and improper, are very pretty. Of course they could only be excused by being addressed to a young lady to whom you were fondly attached, and who was fondly attached to you. In fact, they ought never to have been seen save by four eyes,—yours and hers. I am sorry, therefore, that Brooks, the blunderer, fancying that I must

be the mistress meant, brought them to me. Sorry, too, that I gave way to curiosity and read them before I well knew what I was about. I know now they were meant for Mary Harbury; and though I repeat I think them very wrong, and would not for the world that Mrs. Harbury saw them, still I am pleased that your passion for Mary Harbury has gone so far. You know what my wishes are, and all I say is, considering how you have led her into this most mysterious scrape about the White Lady and these verses, and the way in which you have been thrown together, and your names coupled since you have been here, Mary ought not to leave the house before you have made to her an explicit declaration of your intentions. Now go, I am sure that you will do what is right and proper. My great desire,—in fact, my sole desire in life now is to see you married to Mary Harbury. Now go, I must be busy with my accounts.'

CHAPTER XII.

HOW I WAS TORMENTED BY MARY HARBURY.

Now, was I not the most unfortunate of men? To have my very verses turned against me and given to the wrong woman. It was all owing to Auntie's perversity in making up her mind that Mary Harbury, and Mary Harbury alone, was to be the object of my affections. This blinded her so, that when I made love to Arethusa she thought it meant for Mary. Yes! it was all that wretched ring-fence and a desire to add house to house, so eloquently denounced by the old prophets.

I went out of Aunt Mandeville's room in no very desirable frame of mind. It is all very well to say, 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite,' but my main wish at that moment was to murder that blunderer Brooks who had brought me into this fresh strait. Luckily for him he did not cross my path. He was refreshing himself, no doubt, in his pantry, pretending to clean the plate or some of the many things butlers are sup-

posed to do, and do not. My 'little hands'—they were little—were not destined to be imbrued in the blood of a butler.

As I walked about in a wild sort of way, I met Arethusa and Mary Harbury, now sworn sisters in arms, going out for a walk.

'Come with us, Mr. Halfacre, we want to know all about those verses,' said Arethusa.

I should have told you that, as soon as a scene between me and Aunt Mandeville seemed imminent, the whole party at the breakfast-table melted away like snow in June, leaving us alone. No! not one single curious person stayed to hear it out. No one then staying at Mandeville Hall would have had such bad taste.

All that was known, therefore, was that the packet contained some beads and some verses which I had written, but for whom they were meant, and whether they were amatory or satirical, no one knew. There was just enough to awaken curiosity.

'Yes, I should so like to know all about them,' said Mary Harbury, little suspecting what Aunt Mandeville thought about them.

'Oh!' I said, 'they are only some silly verses to an imaginary object of my affections. Things that young men sometimes write to see if they can express themselves with feeling — rehearsals,

attempts, essays, tasks,—call them what you will. Such things, Miss Harbury, are only worth notice when they are addressed to some real person; then they crystallise round an object, and the result is actual love.'

'And have your affections ever crystallised round such an object?' asked Mary, with a simplicity which made the home-thrust she gave me more telling.

'No lessons out of school, if you please, Miss Harbury. I am not going to confess anything, or to deny anything. As for these verses, I was merely speaking of such effusions philosophically, and with no reference to myself.'

'But they were your verses,' said Arethusa. 'I suppose, when you wrote them you had an object.'

'Yes,' I said, quietly, 'I had an object; but let us talk of something else. What did you think of Count Manteuffel's explanation about the White Lady?'

'Mr. Halfacre will not be drawn,' said Mary Harbury. 'He has gone to ground, as the fox-hunters say, and won't be unearthed. Arethusa, dear, we had better talk about the ghost.'

'Well,' I said, 'and what do you think of the story?'

'If you ask me,' said Arethusa, 'I think that it

was a dream. I mean that the Count, who had heard about the White Lady, and who, as we all saw, was attracted by her portrait, went to bed, fell asleep, dreamt all that he fancies he saw awake, got out of bed as he woke with a start after the dream, rushed out, and, by what I must admit to be one of the strangest chances possible, met us in the very act of doing what he had just dreamt as already done. His conception of the ghost was much more sudden and sustained than ours. We had been about it two days,—he, probably, not two minutes; but the ghost had only possessed his mind as it possessed ours; both he and we were taken up with the subject. The only difference being that he was passive and we active, and that we were a long time under the influence of the White Lady, while with him she crossed his mind for a moment in his sleep.’

‘Most philosophical!’ I exclaimed.

‘And what do you think yourself, Mr. Half-acre?’ said Mary Harbury.

‘Perhaps it may be as Miss Chichester explains it. She seems to have paid more attention to dreams than any of us. No doubt, what with those ghost stories, and the impression always made on visitors by the portrait of the White Lady, we have been all, more or less—I except, of course, Major Plunger and Mr. Twentyman—under the

influence of the supernatural. When the difference of condition is sleeping and waking, and when several persons are thinking of the same thing, that thing will show itself in different ways. We were the active embodiment of the White Lady,—the very ghost itself,—though we only thought we were making believe, as the children say. On the other hand, the Count's mind was the mere passive recipient, and so the White Lady seemed to visit him in a dream.'

'All this is beyond me,' said Mary Harbury, with a puzzled face. 'I would much sooner believe that the White Lady did really appear to the Count. It would cost me less—I mean I should grasp that with less effort than these active and passive states, and conditions of thought. But you and Arethusa are so clever. Is there no other way out of the difficulty?'

'Yes! two; and you may take your choice, Miss Harbury. The first is, that the Count had by some means found out our plan, and was waiting to rush out on us just as we had been sitting up to frighten him. The second is, that he invented the whole story, and saw the White Lady neither in a dream nor awake.'

'But why did he rush out then? I suppose even in Germany Counts don't rush out in that wild way into galleries at dead of night for nothing,' said Mary.

‘It comes at last to this,’ I said, ‘though it is only what Aunt Mandeville said at first: “It is a very strange story: a very strange story.”’

‘I am convinced your Aunt firmly believes in the White Lady,’ said Arethusa.

‘Perhaps she does,’ I said. ‘Perhaps she has more reason to believe in her than any one else. As for myself, so long as the White Lady only appears on her own side of the house, and only at the September full moon, I do not at all grudge her her one night in the year.’

So we went on discussing the preternatural, I with the two girls on either side, till it was time to turn back. Before we reached home we all agreed that we would watch the Count, and see if he showed any reluctance to go to bed. That would be some guide. No one is so ready to sleep in a room two nights running when he has seen a ghost in it the first of the two. Of course, on the doctrine of chances one ought to do so most willingly, because though it is true that what has happened once may happen again, it is no less true that what has happened once is less likely to happen for some time afterwards. But then, ghosts may be exempt from the doctrine of chances.

All that evening, then, we watched the Count. He had gone out shooting with Colonel Chichester

in the afternoon, and we had seen little of him; but I am bound to say that, when we did see him, nothing could have been more cool and collected. He was as pleasant and lively as ever, had apparently quite forgiven our attempt on his rest of the night before, inquired most tenderly after Mary Harbury's arm, hoping it would soon be well, and even touched on that very delicate subject, my verses, but only to say that it was very natural to write love-verses; when he was young he had done it, and no harm had come of it. It was a sort of safety-valve to let off feeling that would otherwise burst the boiler—he meant the heart—the only thing was that no one else should read them, and that they ought to be burnt as soon as possible.

‘Oh!’ said Aunt Mandeville, ‘Edward and I quite understand each other about the verses; so let us hear no more of them. The only mistake in the matter was made by Brooks, who fancied they must be meant for me.’

As she said this, Aunt Mandeville gave a sort of indescribable wink, though it was not a wink at all; it was rather an indication by the eyes, which said plainly, ‘Edward, mind and take Mary Harbury in to dinner, and mind you make yourself agreeable to her.’

Need I add that Arethusa was again thrown away on that dolt Twentyman?

Did I make myself agreeable to Mary Harbury? Of course I did. You know I rather liked her. Provided I was not to make love to her, I was quite ready to sit by her and amuse her; but it was plain from Aunt Mandeville's manner that she would be satisfied with nothing short of a proposal and acceptance. There was a sort of marriage-or-your-life air about her which had the effect of making her what the Scots call 'fey.' In that state of mind people become transparent, as it were; they are so carried away, that they take little pains to conceal their thoughts and feelings, so that they stand bare to the rest of the world, which is apt to make the same kind remarks on their mental condition, as it would if it saw them walking up and down, clad after the fashion of the South Sea Islanders, that is, with nothing on at all.

I am sure Aunt Mandeville was not at all aware of it herself; but the way in which she seemed to have taken the bit between her teeth, as to my marriage with Mary Harbury, was ridiculously evident, and to me most disgusting.

'When is it to be, my boy?' said Colonel Chichester, after dinner.

'Wish you luck, Halfacre,' said Major Plunger. 'What good shooting you will have when the two estates are rounded off!'

‘Hope it will be in our time,’ said the idiotic Twentyman, who had sat next to Arethusa, saying nothing for an hour and a half.

He meant by ‘our time,’ before the 105th Heavy Dragoons were ordered off to Ireland or Norwich.

‘Miss Harbury is a delightful girl,’ said Count Manteuffel; ‘and as it is now no secret, if we were in Germany we should drink good luck to the happy pair.’

‘Why not?’ said Major Plunger. ‘Health-drinking has gone out in England; but it is a good old custom, which I should be glad to see revived.’

The brute! he was only too glad to have an opportunity of pouring more wine down his gullet.

There was no help for it. The toast was drunk, and I returned thanks in a very diplomatic speech, saying, ‘that though at that moment I had not the least intention of marrying any one, I hoped that whenever I did marry I should be happy with my future wife. At any rate it should not be my fault if she were not a happy woman.’

‘All very pretty,’ said the Major. ‘I’ll bet you’re married before Christmas.’

There was no good protesting. Aunt Mandeville had set the fashion, and all my remonstrances were set down to modesty. And all this time,

mind you, I had never said one word that could be taken for the faintest approach to love-making to Mary Harbury.

As for the Count, I was beginning to hate him ; and I thought him and his horrid German fashion of drinking toasts and healths to ‘happy pairs,’ before they are even engaged or thinking of it, a downright impertinence. He was paying me off handsomely for playing the ghost on him. But it all came to the same in the end. It was all Aunt Mandeville’s fault, who would make me marry Mary Harbury. The more she wished it, and mistook my feelings, the more resolved I was to have my own way, and to marry no one but Arethusa.

‘Do give us some music, Mary ; one of Beethoven’s sonatas,’ said my Aunt, when we joined the ladies.

Now, you must know that Mary Harbury had no real taste for music ; she played fairly, and that was all. Arethusa played very well ; she had a very good ear, and great genius and execution ; she transposed at sight, and played all sorts of tricks with her pieces just as she pleased. When she ceased, every one said, ‘Do play us something more ;’ but when Mary Harbury played, no one said anything except what they were bound to say — ‘How very pretty !’

Here, again, was a proof of my Aunt's infatuation. She was playing the part of the step-mother in the fairy tale, and making a Cinderella of the true princess, while the ugly and stupid daughter was promoted and pushed forward.

'Go, Edward, and stand by Miss Harbury, and turn over the leaves for her; it will make her less nervous.'

So there I had to stand, listening to a very indifferent execution of one of Beethoven's grand pieces, while the girl who could have really played it was neglected. Yes! I had to stand there on false pretences before a house full of friends,—a victim decked for sacrifice to the great principle of doing the best for the estate, and in order that the Mandeville Hall and Harbury properties might be rounded off in a ring-fence.

It was too disgusting.

But wasn't it all my own fault? It would be, though it wasn't just yet. If I allowed this state of things to go on I should be bound to marry Mary Harbury; and so, as I stood there, I resolved to tell my Aunt the state of my feelings, and that, if I married any one, it must be Arethusa Chichester.

All that evening Arethusa behaved like an angel. She praised Mary Harbury's playing; the piece was very difficult, and she had got through it

admirably. Perhaps the instrument was a little flat, and a string or two jarred—anything rather than lay the blame on her rival. The fact was that Arethusa felt herself quite safe, and there is nothing that makes girls so amiable as that sort of success. She could afford to praise Mary Harbury, and she praised her. Besides, have I not told you it was quite possible to like Mary Harbury? She had many good qualities, and was eminently fitted to make any man who loved her happy; but then, unfortunately, I did not love her.

Why did Auntie take me to Ilfracombe? Why did I not go elsewhere on a reading party? Why did I ever see Arethusa? Why did she not go on as she had begun—laughing at me and mocking me? Why was I born to be so unfortunate as to gain the affections of such a girl, and yet to be forced to marry some one else? These were the questions I put to myself over and over again that night. The only relief I saw was that things could not go on as they were; that there must soon be an explosion. Anything was better than living in such a false position.

Mary Harbury's playing had such a soporific effect—the Major, I need not say, was the first to feel it—that we were all half asleep when it was over; and, let me tell you, one of Beethoven's sonatas is no joke to sit through,

especially when it is murdered. Why don't I say 'executed?' Well, executed, if it pleases you better. Of the two I had sooner be 'murdered' than 'executed;' but tastes differ. When it was over, I say, we all felt it high time to go to bed. The excitement of the night before, I daresay, had something to do with it, but the music had more. We all crawled off, therefore, like flies on a fine autumn day, when a warm sun has restored their suspended life; lazily and leisurely we crawled up to bed, scarce able to put one foot before the other. How glad I was to get to my own room, to stir the fire savagely! Yes, though it was only September, we had fires all through the month at Mandeville Hall. It was Aunt Mandeville's order. She said it aired the rooms, and those who did not like them might let them out, but lighted they must be! The consequence was that no one ever caught his death of cold from damp rooms at Mandeville Hall.

Having wreaked my vengeance on the coals, and heaped fresh fuel on them in a most anti-Christian spirit, I threw myself into an easy chair and began to storm.

No! I would not be so treated, even by Aunt Mandeville. I would not be sold, nor rounded off, nor ring-fenced. I would do this, and I would do that. I would run away, I would enlist, I would take orders—anything rather than marry Mary

Harbury. I would marry Arethusa in spite of every one. Of course, I now see that the person against whom my wrath ought to have been vented was myself. I ought not to have fallen in love with Arethusa, and when I had fallen in love with her I ought at once to have informed Aunt Mandeville of the state of my affections. But forty sees so very plainly what twenty-two is stone-blind to. Let forty change places with twenty-two, and he will do pretty much as twenty-two does, and always will do. As though love did not steal over us at that age so sweetly and so softly that we are fast bound before we know it. Talk of the Old Man of the Mountain! the young boy with the bow and arrows is twice as hard to shake off, and if you do succeed in throwing him off your shoulders, on he is again in a trice, as fast seated as ever. It is so natural to love at that age, that all the arguments of all the old sages and philosophers will never convince one really youthful heart of the folly of falling in love. As for Arethusa, I am quite sure that Diogenes himself would not have been proof against her grace and beauty; the nasty old fellow would have crawled out of his tub and followed her all over the world, like a dog as he was.

I was just getting over my rage, for though you will none of you believe it—that is, you who

only know so much of me as I choose to tell you in this book, where you see me under the greatest difficulties—I am naturally very sweet-tempered. Rage was just taking the hue of resolution, and I had again resolved to have it out to-morrow with Auntie—yes! to-morrow, directly after breakfast—and to tell her point blank that she was quite mistaken about the reason,—that the verses were meant for *Arethusa*, and for no one else, and that nothing could induce me to have anything to do with Mary Harbury, when — the door slowly opened, and in walked — Mary Harbury!

I really thought I must have fainted of vexation, though I saw at once how it was. The poor thing was walking in her sleep, and was repeating in her dreams her part of the night before. She wore the dress improvised for the *White Lady*, and carried a lighted taper in her hand. She walked up to me a step or two, then turned and beckoned me to follow her.

Now see, another misfortune—see how Fate was determined to mix me up with this young lady, who, sleeping or waking, was ever doomed to haunt me and embitter my existence. Follow her I must. I could not seize hold of her other arm and give her a good clutch, as the Count had done the night before. Such behaviour, besides being rude, would have roused her with a shock,

which might have had serious consequences. I could not call out and alarm the house for the same reason; I had no time to seek some one else to go with me; no, there was but one way, and that was to follow her, and try to prevent her from coming to harm.

So I followed her along the gallery, down the staircase, through the hall, and up the other staircase. It was now getting past a joke. She was plainly bent on going to the Count's room, and into that room, if she went, I had to follow her. It was wonderful to see how quickly she went, without a moment's hesitation, shading her taper with one hand, just as Arethusa had done, while it seemed to have a charmed light, and never to be in the least danger of going out. I tried to get before her and turn her, but she was too nimble, my place was to follow, not to lead, and all the while there was a wild sort of joy upon her face, as though she gloried in what she was about.

And now she reaches the Count's door. Will she enter? She turns the handle. Thank God it is locked! The Count was a wise man, far wiser than I had been; remembering the night before, he had turned the key, and so ought I to have turned mine, and then Mary Harbury would never have been able to get in.

It was curious to see her when she felt herself

foiled. At first she tried the door again, and then all at once the light of inspiration seemed to fade from her face. She ceased to be transfigured, and became again mere Mary Harbury; and as the brightness passed away, she seemed to be loosed from sleep, and in a moment or so she shuddered and said: 'Where am I, and where is Arethusa? Is that you, Mr. Halfacre?'

'Yes,' I said; 'let me lead you back.' And without another word I led her back to her own room, and, opening the door, said: 'Good night, Miss Harbury.'

'Good night,' she murmured, mechanically; 'I am so tired;' and then she closed the door.

I must say that I threw myself on my bed that night in fear and great perplexity at my cruel fate. My last words were: 'What a fool I was not to bolt my door like that wary fox, Count Mantuffel!' though what right I had to expect such a strange visitant,—while the Count, on the contrary, might well have expected her—I am sure I can hardly tell. Since then I never go to bed without bolting the door; but what is that but locking the stable after the steed has been stolen?

It was not to be expected that the Count would be silent if he had heard the door tried. It was not in human nature.

I was quite prepared, therefore, to hear him

say, as soon as he came down to breakfast,—it so happened we were all down before him :—

‘So you were at it again last night, Mr. Halfacre! But I was too wary for you. You ought to have taken the bolt off my door, and hampered the lock, so that it might not shut. “Fast bind, fast find,” is a German as well as an English proverb. You found me fast, though not fast asleep.’

‘What is all this?’ asked Aunt Mandeville, looking first at Arethusa, who sat there as guiltless as a lamb.

‘I am sure I cannot tell,’ said Arethusa. ‘If anything happened last night, all I can say is, I had nothing to do with it. I fell asleep as soon as I went to bed, and never stirred till daylight. How did you sleep, Mary?’

‘I hardly know what happened,’ said Mary Harbury, blushing a blush like all the roses in the world at once; ‘but Mr. Halfacre knows all about it; perhaps he can tell. All I remember is that Mr. Halfacre put me into my own room, and wished me “good night;” but before that it seemed as though I had been walking half over the house with him.’

At this Aunt Mandeville put on her severest face. She could be very severe—far more so than Madam Harbury—when she chose. She

mused for a moment, and then said, very seriously :
‘As you told us what happened the night before, Count Manteuffel, perhaps you can tell us what happened last night to disturb your rest.’

‘My story,’ said the Count, ‘is very short. I lay awake thinking my fair friends might return, but I first bolted my door ; and when they came, or when some one came,—there must have been two, for I heard voices,—they could not get in, and, after twisting and turning the handle once or twice, they went away down the gallery, and all was still. Then I fell asleep, and I am sure no one entered my room last night.’

All this time Mary Harbury continued blushing.

‘Thank you, Count,’ said my Aunt. ‘And now, Edward, as Miss Harbury’—observe, she called her Miss, not Mary,—‘says you know all about it, perhaps you will tell us what really did happen.’

Now I knew from what Aunt Mandeville had said the day before about the verses, as well as from her obstinacy in giving Mary Harbury the credit of having inspired the passion shown in them, that she fancied I was very much in love with Mary Harbury, and ready to believe anything. The only way, therefore, to clear my character was, as it always is, to tell the truth ; and so I told them

how Miss Harbury had walked in her sleep into my room, the lock of which I had been so imprudent as not to turn, as the Count had turned his; that she had beckoned me to follow her, and that I had done so, as far as the Count's door, with fear and trembling; how glad I had been to find it locked; how the sudden obstacle to her purpose had gradually caused her to shake off her sleep; how I had led her back by the way which we came, and how, as she truly said, I had put her into her room, and bade her good night.

I believe I blushed quite as much as Mary Harbury while I was telling this story. I am sorry to say I am not like a man I once knew, who never blushed above his throat. He used to say that whenever he did anything to be ashamed of you would have found his arms and chest as red as red could be, but that the colour never mantled on his brow or cheek. A most convenient blusher! I only wish I could have imitated him that morning, but I could not. If Mary Harbury's cheeks were roses, mine were peonies of the deepest dye. It added to my shame to see that Arethusa was staring at me with a face of scorn, that the men were all laughing, and that Aunt Mandeville, though she seemed to be angry, was rather pleased that I should have been in any way drawn nearer to Mary Harbury.

‘Did you ever walk in your sleep before, Mary dear?’ said Arethusa, in a voice far softer and sweeter than any zephyr.

‘Never, that I know of,’ said Mary.

‘And do you think you will ever do it again?’ said the blockhead Twentyman. ‘If so, I should so like to be there to see. What a lucky fellow you always are, Halfacre! No one else ever gets a chance.’

He thought that very witty, no doubt. How I wish he were young now, going in for a direct commission, and having to answer a question as to what ‘wit,’ ‘irony,’ and ‘satire’ mean. Would he have answered any better than the candidate who said ‘that “wit” consisted in saying something that put a fellow’s “monkey up,” as when one boy said to another, “You are a fool?”’ ‘That was a very witty observation.’ ‘As to “irony,”’ he said, ‘when a fellow takes medicine with steel in it, and tastes it afterwards, that is “irony.”’ ‘The “satires” were a wild tribe in ancient times, that ate human flesh like the New Zealanders.’ Yes; I have no doubt that lout Twentyman would answer, were he now examined, quite as wittily as the candidate I have quoted.

Now my Aunt came to Mary Harbury’s help.

‘Poor dear child! If you never walked in your sleep before, you certainly walked last night. How

fortunate it was that Edward was able to render you this little assistance; and how lucky you thought—in your sleep, of course,—of going into his room first! I do not agree with Edward in blaming himself for not bolting his door. And as for you, Edward, I think you acted with great presence of mind, and I shall write an account of the whole affair over to Mrs. Harbury this afternoon. I hope to persuade your mamma'—this was to Mary—'to let you stay here another week.'

Here Brooks bolted in, restrained by no fear of the consequences. 'Dear me, missis! here's Mary Jane and Susan gone and given Mrs. Jellybag warning; for they say they just peeped into the hall last night, as they came home from Stoneleigh feast, and if they didn't see the White Lady walking about, holding a candle in her hand; and Master Edward, brave as a lion, running after her and longing to look at her face, and trying to blow the candle out.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Brooks,' said Aunt Mandeville; 'we know all about it; and bid Mrs. Jellybag tell Mary Jane and Susan, if they stay out so late at any feast, they shall both have warning the very next morning.'

'Certainly, ma'am,' said Brooks, who collapsed and disappeared.

The ladies now went. I scarcely dared to look

at Arethusa, but I could see by the little toss she gave her head—how beautifully it was set on the nape of her neck, so different from the clumsy way in which women's heads are usually stuck on their shoulders!—I could see by that, as well as by a little flutter of her manner, that I should soon be under a Passion-flower of a very different kind from that under which we sat three or four days back.

‘Upon my word, Halfacre,’ said Colonel Chichester, as we men walked on the terrace after breakfast, ‘you are a lucky man. Night and day is all the same to you; you are always equal to the occasion, whether in the water or out of it; now saving ladies’ lives in rivers, and now escorting them about the house at dead of night, like a Paladin of ancient times, careful to see that they come to no harm.’

‘I really could not help acting as I did in either case; but I repeat what I said before, that I have no intention of marrying Miss Harbury. Circumstances over which I have no control have thrown us oddly together; that is all.’

‘Come!—come!’ said Major Plunger, who, of course, had slept through it all without turning, ‘come—come! You don’t mean to say you have no such intentions. Miss Harbury seems to have intentions on you then, else why did she come

walking in her sleep into your room? It's clear her thoughts must run after you by day, or she would not be walking after you in her sleep. Think what an honour it is, my boy, and accept your luck. Then the estate——'

I am sorry to say—but all true lovers, male and female, will forgive me, I am sure—that I cut the Major short by an expletive not at all compatible with the coolness of the estate in a future state. I do verily believe that as the Red Indians expect to rise again with their horses, dogs, and bows, so some of our landowners think that their estates will rise with them—not against them—at the last day, and that it will still be Dunderhead of Dunderhead Hall in the Kingdom of Heaven.

I really must beg pardon for being so furious against land and landed estates. If you wait till this story is finished and rounded off—and till you have heard the last of the ring fence—you will see that I have good reason.

'Well—well; don't be angry,' said the Major, who really was a good-hearted man; 'I only meant to say that it isn't every one who has such a pretty girl and such a fine property waiting to fall into his mouth. I only meant it for your own good.'

'It isn't for my own good, and I won't have it. Why don't you, Twentyman — why don't you

speak up for yourself, and marry Miss Harbury and her ring fence?’

‘Why, you see,’ said Twentyman, slowly and solemnly; ‘first of all, I am not as clever as you. You no sooner sit down by a girl than she begins to smile, and then to laugh. So they sometimes do when I sit by them; but then it’s never *with* me, but always *at* me. In fact, they think me a fool; and I am not sure they ain’t quite right. Next’—here this gallant six feet three of pipe-clay drew a deep breath—‘next, I am not heir, or as good as heir, to Mandeville Hall, and so I couldn’t round off the two estates; and last, I’m not a Halfacre. I know birth don’t go for much with men now-a-days, except they’re snobs; but it goes for a good deal with women; and depend on it, as a mere matter of speculation, it pays better to be born a Mandeville, or, as your Aunt prefers Saxon blood, a Halfacre than a Twentyman.’

Having uttered this oration, which, besides its own length, was, it must be admitted, full of common sense, the gigantic heavy dragoon lighted a cigar, and vanished in a cloud of his own smoke.

After this had happened on the terrace, I was alone, but sorely afraid to enter the house, lest I

should meet Arethusa's angry eye. As I lingered, Aunt Mandeville leaned out of the window of her room, and said :

‘ You see you can't help it, Edward ; what must be, must be. Better make short work of it, and do it this very day.’

‘ Do what, Auntie ?’

‘ Do what I wish ; propose to Mary Harbury, and make both her and me happy.’ Then she drew in her head and disappeared.

‘ Yes ! I will do it. I'll go indoors first and have it out with Arethusa, and in the afternoon I'll tell the truth to Aunt Mandeville.’

So I spoke to myself, and had just reached the garden door from the drawing-room, when out came Arethusa herself !

‘ Whither away, Arethusa ?’ I said.

‘ Yes ! whither away ; you are quite right to say whither away, when you win my affections one day only to crush them the next. That Passion-Flower—how I hate it !—and the false words you uttered under it. “ Whither away,”—I wish it were withered away, root and branch.’

‘ Very unkind to the Passion-Flower, Arethusa darling ! Believe me, my passion-flower has never withered. But why be so unkind to me, too, when I have done nothing to deserve it ?’

‘ Done nothing’—why, you are always doing

something. You never can be still like other people. I say nothing of your saving Mary's life; she is welcome to it, and to you, too, if you choose. You couldn't help it. But why you should write Mary Harbury verses, which your Aunt tells me are filled with passion, and only not beautiful because they are so warm, I can't imagine. Then, too, waiting and sitting up at night, instead of going to bed like any one else. I must say that sleep-walking story is a very strange one; and if Mary Harbury were not such a goose, I should almost think——'

Here she stopped for very rage, just as little children, when they are having a good roar, hold their breath for a moment, and then burst out again.

'Well!—and what should you think?'

'Why that it was arranged between you, and that she is a sly, nasty thing;' and here Arethusa,—I am grieved to say it,—burst out crying, which made me very happy.

'Very happy!' you will say; you ought to be ashamed of yourself for making a young lady cry; but let me tell you, reader, that woman's tears—if they are real, and not mere crocodile—are a sure proof of affection; and so Arethusa's tears—nay, her rage itself,—all were a great comfort to me, because they assured me of her passion.

I took her hand and said, as tenderly as I could: 'You were just going for a little turn in the park; let me go with you, and explain it all.'

'I don't want to walk with you,' she said, just as a sulky child refuses a present; but she walked on for all that, and I walked with her. For some time, some seconds rather, her tears fell, one by one, and then she turned rather fiercely still on me and said:

'How about those verses and those beads, which your Aunt showed me last night;—the beads I mean, she would not show me the verses,—and said they were both meant for Mary Harbury.'

'That is all my Aunt's mistake, Arethusa; of course you can always say they were not meant for you, as I never gave them to you. The truth is I was afraid to give them to you, lest you should think them wrong, so I put off giving them from day to day, and carried them about with me, waiting to gain courage. As ill luck would have it, they were lost in the rush from the Count's door, and I never missed them till I saw the packet in the hand of Brooks, who, as you know, mistook the fanciful address, "To my Mistress," for the only "mistress" he had ever heard of,—my Aunt Mandeville'

'I wish I could think they were not meant for

Mary. How did your Aunt come to think they were meant for her?’

‘Because Aunt Mandeville has so made up her mind that I must marry Mary Harbury, that she won’t hear of any one or any thing else. She was very angry, as you know, when she first saw the verses, because she thought they might have been for you, and she was quite right; but, on second thoughts, which are not always the best,—though the proverb says so—she returned to her fixed idea, that I must marry Mary Harbury,—that I could make love to no one but Mary,—and that the verses and the beads must be meant for her. She told me so in the afternoon, just as she told you at night; and she forgave the verses for the sake of the evidence which she thought they gave of the state of my feelings.’

‘And do you mean to marry Mary, Edward?’ asked Arethusa faintly, and looking imploringly in my face.

‘Never, never! Arethusa. I will marry you, and you alone, if you will only have me.’

‘I feel much better in my mind,’ said Arethusa: ‘not nearly so wretched.’

How much further this sweet conversation might have gone, as we wandered away from the house, I cannot tell; for Brooks came on the scene at a most inopportune moment as usual,

shouting out from the brow of the hill down which we had walked,

‘Master Edward! Master Edward!—Missis wants you directly.’

We had to go back only to find Madam Harbury, who had come over to pay a morning visit.

‘What a bore!’ was my remark.

‘But you will not marry Mary?’ said Arethusa; ‘and as for those verses, I should like to see them.’

‘No, darling! Auntie may show them to you if she chooses; I am sure, though, that she never will. For myself, I am quite ashamed of them. You shall have another set all to yourself; of those I hope I shan’t be ashamed.’

‘But I should like those,’ said Arethusa, with a little stamp.

By this time we had reached the house.

‘I don’t care to see Mrs. Harbury,’ said Arethusa, as she turned short off in the hall and went upstairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW I WAS FURTHER TORMENTED, AND HOW WE
TOLD MORE STORIES.

WHEN I got to Aunt Mandeville's room I found her with Madam Harbury and Mary, deep in a version of our sleep-walking adventure. Readers who are great sticklers for truth, those most rigid and cast-iron souls who never told a lie, black or white, in their lives; people who will never utter a conventional falsehood, who will not allow their servants to say 'not at home,' but 'engaged,' thereby insulting half their acquaintance,—such people will be shocked to hear that Aunt Mandeville's version of what had passed was as remarkable for its omissions as for its truthfulness in other respects. The main fact that Mary Harbury had walked in her sleep was there, and that I had followed and protected her was left standing, but all the first part of the story about me and my bedroom had vanished. According to that account they were as good as though they had never existed, and I can only say that, if

history is written in Aunt Mandeville's manner, the world knows as little of its greatest events as we are assured it does of its greatest men.

Was Aunt Mandeville right? Of course she was. There are some people who cannot bear the truth, just as there are some people who cannot drink milk or live in Paris; the truth, and the milk, and the air are too strong for them. Mrs. Harbury,—or Madam Harbury, as I delight to call her,—was one of those people who would shriek at the naked truth—as loudly as they would at a man in the same state. Aunt Mandeville was not fond of shrieking; she knew her woman, and gave her a poetic version of that night's adventure.

I am not so sure that she said anything about the White Lady. You know she was never very fond of mentioning her, and she was glad to escape it; the more so as she knew that Madam Harbury would 'disapprove entirely of it.' Yes! that is the right phrase of such 'ridiculous disguises.' You see, therefore, all of you, how little chance such a woman as Madam Harbury has of ever hearing the truth about anything. People had with her to be careful of what they said. 'How will Madam Harbury like this?' they said to themselves. 'Her views are so peculiar.' You had to do a sum in morality as soon as you saw her. Yes! she was like those unhappy people who can't eat

pork, and are condemned to live in Tahiti where it is the standing dish. Such people are too good for this wicked world, which lives in an atmosphere of white lies in indifferent matters, and yet loves truth in essentials quite as dearly as all the Madam Harburys in the universe.

Aunt Mandeville was quite right then, and after she had made the most of the shreds of the story with which she had to piece together her narrative, and, I must say, had given me much more praise than I deserved, she ended by asking if Mary had ever before walked in her sleep.

‘No,’ said Madam Harbury; ‘but then you know we are such quiet people, we never have anything to excite us at Harbury.’

‘One thing though, I should like to know,’ she went on; ‘your narrative, which is very interesting in a psychological point of view, is wanting in one fact. How was it that Mr. Half-acre knew that Mary was walking in her sleep? for, as I understand you, it was late at night. How was it, Mary?’

‘Why, mamma,’ Mary began, but she was not allowed to proceed. Aunt Mandeville having drawn a deep breath after the word ‘psychological’—a famous word, by the way, for that dictation which for the future is to be the sole test of the

British officer's knowledge of English—Aunt Mandeville was afraid of the episode of the bedroom coming out, and, like most people who tell white lies, and have to follow them up with grey or black ones, as the case may be, she snatched the words out of the blushing Mary's mouth, and said :

‘Edward was sitting up reading. Young men will sit up studying, you know. You may bring them to bed, but you can't make them enter it. He was sitting up, and hearing a noise in the gallery, he looked out, saw Mary walking along it, and followed her. You know the rest.’

‘Dear me ! how fortunate !’ said Mrs. Harbury. ‘I wonder what would have become of Mary if Mr. Halfacre had not followed her.’

Here I came to my Aunt's assistance.

‘I believe Miss Harbury would have done as other sleep-walkers have done many thousand times before. It is very seldom, indeed, that they come to any harm. If left to themselves, they wander about the house, or even out of it ; and then, as the impulse seems to leave them, they come to themselves, to find that they are in all kinds of strange, out-of-the-way places ; but as often as not the fit lasts till they return whence they came, and they get into their own beds, never knowing that they have left them for a moment. The great danger they run is in being suddenly awakened by

injudicious persons. This was really all the service I rendered to Miss Harbury, by taking care that she came to no harm, either from her own act or from other persons' stupidity.'

This, I daresay, you will all think a very boring speech. I should call it—and I have Madam Harbury's authority for doing so—'very interesting and very philosophical.' Heaven help a woman when she gets into the 'ologies' or 'sophys,' into that vast region of platitudes which lies stretched between theology and philosophy. There she wanders, maundering about in the most helpless and hopeless way. Do we men never maunder and wander about in that dreary region? Very often; but then, at any rate, we sometimes know the meaning of the words we use, though not always, and so carry off our ignorance better, by seeming to know something of what we are talking about.

'Well!' said Madam Harbury, 'I must be gone. We have our Harbury Anti-Papal Demonstration to-day, and a Prize Essay by Mr. Knagger on "The Mark of the Beast" is to be read to the school children, and they are to show their work. By the way, Mary, have you done that sampler which you were to work as a pattern?'

'No, Mamma, I am sorry to say I have not. It got rather spoiled, too, when I fell into the

river, and all the colours in the silk ran. Here it is. Do you think it worth finishing?’

Here Mary Harbury, in the most innocent way in the world, pulled out of her pocket—I believe it was tied round her waist with a tape—that famous work of art. I must say it looked in a deplorable condition, and if it were a pattern of anything, it must have been of untidiness. For that it would certainly have carried off the first prize. I believe it had lain in that pocket, crumpled up, ever since it had been in the river. Poor Mary’s head had been so full of White Ladies and midnight walks, that she had never done a stroke of work on the sampler since the first evening of her stay

And this was the bread-and-butterish sort of woman for whom I was to give up Arethusa!

But, to proceed. Aunt Mandeville said, as she saw Madam Harbury’s face growing even more like a vinegar-cruet than usual, and worse, a vinegar-cruet in the act of pouring out its contents:

‘You must not be too hard upon Mary. She really has had no time to work at the sampler since she was here; all that day of the accident she could not work, and really she has better things to do; she is too old for samplers. She has given us some beautiful music since she has been here, and indeed we are all charmed with her.’

‘That sampler,’ said the vinegar-cruet, ‘was

expressly requested by Mr. Knagger. He said it was a pity that young ladies never worked samplers now with some good Scripture-text on them,—“Set your affections on things above;” or “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” for instance. He will be very disappointed to hear that the sampler is not done, and so am I, Mary.’

‘I could not help it, mamma; I really could not!’ said Mary, her eyes full to the brim, and full, not of vinegar, but of tenderness.

‘That is the excuse the idle and the vicious always make, Mary. Any sin they regard as venial merely by saying I could not help it.’

‘What Mary says is quite true,’ said Aunt Mandeville. ‘She really could not help it, for she has tried.’

‘That is just what I complain of in young people of the present day,’ said Mrs. Harbury, returning to the charge with a perseverance worthy of a better cause; ‘they rush into the vortex of frivolity and dissipation, forgetting their immortal souls, and look on life as a playground rather than as a school to bring us to a better state. So it is that they forget their duties, and become neglectful of their parents, and wanting in respect to their spiritual pastors and masters. So it is with the children of this world, and so it will be, I am sadly afraid, with Mary.’

Here was the vinegar out and all over us; as for poor Mary she dissolved then and there into a flood of tears.

Even then the hard-hearted mother was not softened.

‘Tears, Mary,’ she said, ‘are of no avail, unless they are tears of real repentance. Dry them, and work me another sampler by the next school-meeting.’

And with that Madam Harbury stalked off, confident, in her own mind, that she had acted in the most Christian manner, when, by her uncompromising denunciation of the world and its pleasures, she had nearly broken her daughter’s heart, and quite disgusted Aunt Mandeville and myself.

‘Dear me!’ said Aunt Mandeville, when the mother and daughter had left the room, Mary trying still to be forgiven, and Mrs. Harbury holding sternly out. ‘Dear me, what a dreadful temper for a true Christian, as I really believe Mrs. Harbury is. You will have much to bear from your future mother-in-law, Edward; but at any rate, you will have your consolation and comfort in the affection of your wife. Mary’s heart is in the right place, I am quite sure. And as for me, why, you will ever find me your dear old Aunt Mandeville.’ •

Then was the time to have had it out—why did I not? If you must know, I was still afraid

and irresolute. Is that a fault? If so, I only share it with some of the greatest characters in history and fiction. What was Hamlet but irresolute: an oak planted in a china vase, as Goethe termed him, whose will, and the work he had to do, shattered the frail potsherd in which he grew? I had excuses, too: very good ones, as the irresolute ever have. It was so near luncheon, I should never have time to say my say out, and Aunt Mandeville was so kind and good I should be so sorry to say anything to hurt her feelings. But I had my own opinion as to Mary Harbury's heart. I doubted whether it was in the right place. A girl who could burst into tears when absurdly scolded about a miserable sampler was no mate for me. Talk of comparing her with Arethusa; it was simply ridiculous.

Then, as to Mary's affections towards me, what did I know of them? She always seemed pleased to see me, and was very grateful to me; but so she was pleased to see other people, and just as grateful to them. No; she wanted character. Were she not without any strength of mind would she have so readily agreed to play the ghost? With Arethusa it would have been strength of mind; just as she proved her strength of mind in refusing to be the White Lady; for never was she more right in anything than in saying that Aunt Mande-

ville would not forgive her, but would not be angry with Mary Harbury. Yes; Mary Harbury had no strength of mind, no insight, no perception; she was altogether an inferior being, if I may use such an expression of a young lady, and so my conclusion was again the same. Mary Harbury was not to be mentioned on the same day with my own Arethusa.

‘Have you done it?’ whispered Arethusa, as we left the luncheon-table.

‘No; I had no time: that odious Madam Harbury stayed so long.’

‘Mind and do it this afternoon,’ said Arethusa, ‘or you’ll be married to Mary before you know where you are. The plums of your wedding-cake are already gathered, and it will be made of this year’s wheat.’

‘What nonsense! I’ll go and have it out with Aunt Mandeville this very moment!’ and off I went after her to have it out.

Before I could overtake her, the wheels of a carriage were heard, and in a minute or two, Brooks announced Lady Meredith.

It really is a great shame that I have not long ago introduced you to Lady Meredith. We knew her so well, and yet I have only once mentioned her. Pray set it down to anything; forgetfulness, fatty degeneration of the brain, love for Arethusa;

anything rather than want of love for Lady Meredith, for she was, without any exception, the most loveable woman in the world. What! more loveable than Arethusa? How you snap one up! Yes, I should say, looking back on both, much more loveable than Arethusa. But then she was years older than I was, though she was not at all old. But in love—love that turns into marriage, I mean—a few years makes all the difference. Besides, is not this a moral and a Christian country? Are there not laws both of good feeling and of the Statute Book? Is there not public and private opinion?—Mr. Knaggers and Madam Harburys running rampant over the land? Was not Lady Meredith Lord Meredith's wife? How, then, should I have fallen in love with her, or feel the same emotions towards her as filled my soul at the sight of Arethusa?

You are quite mistaken, then, if you attach a bad meaning to the word love, as applied to Lady Meredith. Every one loved her; to see her was to love her. I cannot express myself better than by saying that, though all loved her, no man dared to make love to her. Those pests of society, men of renown for victories over other men's wives, professed lady-killers, believed in her, and trembled. You might as well love the moon, or the sun, and hope to win them from their way. Yes;

Lady Meredith was like the chaste Diana, and, like a Diana that never had an Endymion, except Lord Meredith, who, I must say, was in every way worthy of her. They were a perfect pair in this, that you could love the husband in his way just as much as you loved the wife in hers. Both were in every respect delightful.

Well, I mustn't rave on about Lady Meredith, or you will get jealous for Arethusa's sake. In came this charming creature, and you may imagine the relief it was to see her bright face after the sour visage of Madam Harbury.

Let me describe her a little. Lady Meredith was fair, but not too fair; she had golden brown hair, light brown, not dark like Arethusa's; a straight nose, just the least little bit *retroussée*—in that she was like Arethusa, as well as in her perfect figure, a figure which was as good before as behind, and the way she walked, with a firm and yet most graceful and dainty step, and with a swimming gait, as though every limb and joint of her body moved in unison. She had the most beautiful hands and feet I ever saw. No, I am wrong: her feet were not so good as Arethusa's, but her hands were better—her fingers were so fine and taper, and yet so plump. They were softer than anything you ever felt, and it was impossible to compare them to anything in creation. You might compare

one of her hands with the other, and say both were equally beautiful, but there all comparison stopped. Those hands were like no other hands in the world, and when you shook hands with her for the first time, it was to know a new sensation.

What her eyes were like I never knew. For the life of me I could not say what their colour was, but I know they were beautiful, and flashed and sparkled as much—yes, as much as Arethusa's; eyes of which I did know the colour, because I had looked into them much oftener. Like Arethusa, she was tall, but so perfectly made that she looked shorter than she really was.

This lovely frame was the home of a mind as beautiful. Lady Meredith was the kindest-hearted woman that ever lived, so tender and sympathetic. In a word, she so entered at once into all your wants and wishes, all your joys and sorrows, that as soon as you knew her, and she had taken to you, you were at home with her for ever, and felt, wherever you might be, that where Lady Meredith was, there you had a faithful friend.

Was not this a cruse of oil sent to console us for the vinegar with which Madam Harbury had sprinkled us in the morning? For myself I felt as battered as if I had fallen among thieves, and looked on Lady Meredith as the good Samaritan come to bind up my wounds.

Perhaps, too, I was not sorry that she came in the very nick of time between me and my explanation with Aunt Mandeville.

‘Good morning, Lady Meredith,’ said Aunt Mandeville; ‘where have you been? We have not set eyes on you for an age. You left town before us; where have you been since?’

‘We were engaged to go to Scotland for grouse-shooting on the 12th of August,’ said Lady Meredith, ‘and there we have been for the last three weeks, and more. I am so glad to get back, but Lord Meredith never misses the 12th in Scotland. Before the 12th we made a sort of progress northwards, inflicting visitations on our friends, until we got to Perthshire on the 10th. But what have you been doing?’

‘Staying quietly at home,’ said my Aunt Mandeville; ‘Edward is thinking of settling himself for life, and I am helping him to do it.’

‘Of course with that lovely girl Miss Chichester’—let me hasten to say neither Arethusa nor Mary was present,—‘with whom I saw Mr. Halfacre waltzing so well at Lady Onechicken’s ball. I thought her daughter, the great heiress, looked rather wistfully at the pair as they wheeled round, as much as to say, “I would not mind being in Miss Chichester’s place.” If that is the young lady, I wish you joy with all my heart, Mr. Halfacre.’

I could have fallen down and worshipped Lady Meredith on the spot; but I made no answer. Aunt Mandeville made it for me.

‘Oh dear, no! It is not Miss Chichester on whom Edward has fixed his heart. It is all very well waltzing with a nice girl, and I don’t mean to say that Edward does not waltz very well, but waltzing is not marriage. There are other things to be thought of, and Edward, I am glad to say, has fixed his affections on a near neighbour of ours. Can’t you guess, Lady Meredith, who it is?’

‘I’ll try,’ said Lady Meredith. ‘Let me see. It can’t be Martha Grubb. The Grubbs are in the country, but not of it, as Mrs. Harbury says of the saints in the world; and it can’t be the Stewponys, there’s madness in the family. Besides, fancy marrying a girl named Stewpony! How Mr. Stewpony got a wife I can’t imagine. Let me see! Perhaps it’s Mary Harbury. Oh, I see by your face I am right. I am sure I congratulate you, Mr. Halfacre, with all my heart; only I should have thought Mary Harbury rather young to marry.’

‘So she is, Lady Meredith,’ I was beginning to say, but Aunt Mandeville was too quick for me.

‘So she is, Lady Meredith; but when I say settled I only mean that Edward has made up his mind, and that his suit has my best wishes; the

marriage need not take place for some time yet. They are both very young.'

'So we are,' said I, catching at any respite. 'Besides, what is the use of talking about settled when we know neither Mary Harbury's nor her mother's mind on the matter!'

'Then I advise you to do so as soon as possible,' said Lady Meredith. 'These things ought never to be talked of till they are settled.'

'Well, perhaps I was a little too hasty in announcing it to you,' said Aunt Mandeville; 'but you are such an old friend, and have always been so kind and good to Edward, that I thought you would like to know that there was every prospect of his being settled for life, and that by a marriage which not only brings him a charming wife, but also rounds off both properties, and brings the Mandeville and Harbury estates into a ring fence.'

'I think,' said Lady Meredith, 'people sometimes think too much of rounding off their properties by a ring fence, and too little of the feelings of those whom their children or relations marry. After all, what is the good of land but to make us happy? Why should we make ourselves unhappy for the good of the land?' She said this in such a sweet and serious voice that it was impossible for Aunt Mandeville to take

offence, and then she added : ‘ Yes, Mary Harbury is a nice, sweet-tempered girl, and I dare say they may be happy. I wonder, Mr. Halfacre, if you will like your mother-in-law, always supposing that this marriage comes about.’

I now stood on a bit of common ground. No one far and near thought Madam Harbury agreeable, so I answered :

‘ It may be very wrong to say so, but since you ask me, Lady Meredith, I say at once that I don’t like Mrs. Harbury at all. But we are not married yet.’

‘ Quite right, Edward,’ said Aunt Mandeville ; ‘ but you soon will be, and then I hope you will find your mother-in-law better than you hope. At any rate, you need not be troubled with her eccentricities more than you choose ; because, of course, your home will be Mandeville Hall.’

‘ How we go on counting our chickens,’ said Lady Meredith. ‘ I can’t tell why I say so, but I feel as if this marriage were a long way off. How do you know that Mrs. Harbury has not got some other son-in-law in view ?—some shining light out of the Promised Land of Dissent ? And how do know you that Mary Harbury herself has not already made up her mind in another direction ?’

‘ Oh dear, no !’ said Aunt Mandeville, bristling up a little. ‘ There can be no question of that.

Mrs. Harbury will never refuse her daughter to a Halfacre with Mandeville Hall behind him; and, as for Mary, I am sure her heart is free. It would be most ungrateful of her to refuse Edward just after he has saved her life.'

'Saved her life!' said Lady Meredith, with a face of wonder. 'When did that happen? I never heard a word about it.'

So Aunt Mandeville had to tell the whole story of my fishing Mary Harbury up out of the river, and how grateful Mary was, and then she told her own particular version of the sleep-walking adventure, and ended by saying, 'And Edward has presented her with a beautiful set of silver beads, and written her some charming verses; and if all these things are not steps towards a declaration and a proposal, the world is quite changed from what it used to be.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Lady Meredith, 'that things get rather serious when a young gentleman falls to writing love-verses and making presents to a young lady. I don't then see how he is to withdraw, if he wishes it. She is then, you know, "compromised" '—Lady Meredith uttered this word as though it were of the most awful import—'and he has no right to draw back. A good deal, though, would depend upon the verses, as no formal declaration had been made. I am only

throwing these things out, dear Mrs. Mandeville, to show what may be said on the other side.'

'Then read the verses, and judge for yourself,' said Aunt Mandeville; and, in spite of my protestations, she took them out of her cabinet, and gave them to Lady Meredith.

'Oh, Auntie! you said you would burn them. Why have you not done so?'

Lady Meredith read my unhappy verses right through without saying a word. Then she folded them up, and returned them to Aunt Mandeville, still without a word.

'What do you say now?' said my Aunt.

'That the man who wrote those verses is bound in honour to marry the young lady to whom they were addressed.'

'But they were only addressed "To my Mistress," in old English fashion,' I protested, faintly.

'Then in old English fashion you are bound to marry the girl whom you had in your heart when you sent them; and, if you did not do so, were I brother or kinsman of the young lady, I would call you out and shoot you,' said Lady Meredith, fiercely.

'There, Edward! you see what Lady Meredith says. It matters nothing that by a mistake they were lost, and not presented to Miss Harbury.

The real question is the state of your mind towards her, and for a man to write such verses to a girl, and not to marry her, is an unpardonable insult.'

'Well,' said Lady Meredith, 'you asked my opinion, and I have given it freely. I don't mean to say the verses are not very beautiful. They are; but they are so warm and passionate that no man of any right feeling can address them to a young lady without following them up by a proposal of marriage. But I must go home. I am glad to have seen you, and heard this real piece of news.'

'But you will keep it secret for the present, till I give you leave,' said Aunt Mandeville.

'Of course; you may rely on me.' And off the charming creature went, radiant with life and beauty.

'There, Edward,' said my Aunt again, 'you hear what Lady Meredith said. She is almost the only person in the world to whom I would have shown those verses, and I knew you would listen to her opinion with respect. It is clear that you have no right as a man of honour to cherish such feelings in your mind towards Mary Harbury without making a declaration of them to her, and such a declaration I expect you to make at once.'

'But, Auntie—' Tap, tap! came a knock at the door.

‘May I come in?’ said the cheerful voice of Mr. St. Faith.

‘Certainly,’ said my Aunt, always glad to see the Rector.

He came in, and I left them together, while I rushed wildly about the park, cursing my ill fortune which even enlisted my best friends into a band of conspirators whose object was to force me to marry Mary Harbury.

Coming back, I met the whole party—Colonel Chichester, the Count, the Major, Twentyman, and the two young ladies.

‘We knew you were engrossed by that charming Lady Meredith,’ said Colonel Chichester, ‘so Toosy proposed we should all go out for a walk, and here we are, coming back. What a park this is, and what a pity the river makes that great bend down below yonder, and gives such a lovely meadow, which ought to be yours, to Miss Harbury.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ said the Major; ‘it won’t be long, we all know, before the properties are united.’

‘How can that be?’ said Mary Harbury. ‘I don’t see how they should be united; do you, Mr. Halfacre?’

‘No! I assure you I don’t. I really don’t know what Major Plunger is talking about.’

Perhaps he is talking and walking in his sleep. We all know he is a good sleeper, and perhaps sleep-walking is infectious at Mandeville Hall.'

At the same time the Count patted me on the back, and that lout Twentyman kicked me on the ankle, just on the joint outside, as much as to say, 'All very fine, my dear fellow, but we know all about it.'

The Count, who saw I was hurt, changed the conversation, and said, 'We have had a very happy time, chiefly owing to the young ladies, and, though I say it, in spite of the ghost; but the happiest times must end, and our end comes the day after to-morrow. That is the end of our week.'

'But must you really go?' I said, rather clinging to them, and afraid of having too much of Mary Harbury, if the Heavies left us. 'Must you really go? I am sure my Aunt will be delighted if you prolong your visit.'

'You're very good,' said the Count; 'but in a day or two I must leave Warwickshire to go to one of the northern fairs. My head-quarters will be Leamington all the winter. But necessity and business leave me no choice; I must go the day after to-morrow.'

'And so must I,' said the Major.

'And so must I,' said the laconic Twentyman.

‘Sorry for it,’ said the Colonel; ‘we shall all be sorry for it, except the birds; they’ll be very glad when you are gone, Twentyman; you have punished them worst of all of us. I really don’t think you have missed half-a-dozen shots.’

‘The shooting is very good,’ was all that this complimentary speech got out of Twentyman, and yet I knew, even from that single speech of his when I wanted him to try his luck with Mary Harbury, that he was no fool, and could express himself well enough when he chose. The fact was, he was lazy, and would never speak even a little, lest he should be forced to speak more.

‘Is it over?’ whispered Arethusa.

‘No; Lady Meredith was there a long time, and then Mr. St. Faith came.’

‘It will never be over,’ she murmured in reply; ‘and you will get more and more into the mire with Mary until you will not be able to draw back; then you will be swallowed up, and I shall lose you. But it will be some comfort to every one except myself—I daresay even to you—that the properties will be in a ring fence, that the river will no longer eat into your land, and that both the properties will be rounded off and united, in spite of all Mary Harbury’s innocence and pretended ignorance, by your marriage. I daresay it’s all as good as settled, and that’s what my maid says

is the talk of the servants' hall, where Mr. Brooks dilates daily on the absolute necessity of an immediate marriage. No, Edward; you will never recover that midnight march about the house with Mary Harbury, of which Susan and Mary Jane were eye-witnesses.'

Now, here, to add to my woes, was Arethusa getting as jealous as a peacock. I use the expression advisedly. I am told by my gardener that peacocks are 'the jealousest birds as is,' and as a proof, the old peacock has just pecked one of his faithful old peahens to death, merely for looking at a rising young peacock. Yes, Arethusa was as jealous as a peacock, and twice as beautiful. It was a great aggravation to my sorrow to find her in that state; nor was it very easy to pacify her, for she and Mary Harbury now went about together together like the London policemen, who, ever since the Fenian scare, walk about two-and-two by night. I believe Arethusa did it at last to watch Mary Harbury; and as to the absurdity of her being jealous of such a girl, there is nothing that a woman won't be jealous of, if she once takes the fit into her head.

'I don't trouble myself much,' I said, 'about what Brooks says in the servants' hall. He has been an ass all his life, and an ass, I suppose, he will remain to the end of the chapter. Don't you know

what Goethe says—"That no man is a hero to his valet?" And for a very good reason—"not because the hero is not a hero, but because the valet is a valet." Much the same thing is meant when we say that no man is a prophet in his own country. It means not that there are no prophets, but that it is hard to make people who are of inferior minds, and who see the prophets behaving in ordinary matters much as other folk, believe in that prophetic gift which distinguishes the seer from the mass of men.'

'All very fine and very philosophic, I daresay; but I wish they would not talk in the servants' hall of your marriage with Mary as a settled thing. Mark what I said this morning. The wheat is already garnered for your wedding-cake.'

'Then it shall be for my wedding with you, darling.' And I drew her under the Passion-flower again, and we had a reconciliation which, if Brooks had seen it, he would have ordered the church-bells to be rung, at least, and posted up to town himself to fetch a special license from Doctors' Commons.

But Brooks did not see us, and so the bells were not rung.

'When will you settle with Aunt Mandeville?' again Arethusa demanded.

'To-morrow; to-morrow.'

‘We all know what that means; it means that it will never be. Besides, to-morrow is Sunday.’

‘Then I swear it shall be on Monday without fail.’

‘Be it so, then. By this time on Monday there shall be no more mystification between you and Mary Harbury, or—’

‘Or what?’

‘Or I will give you up,’ said Arethusa. ‘I was not born to be trifled with!’

I pass over the dinner of that day. We lived by bread alone. We all seemed thinking, and had we been all Twentymans we could not have been more silent. Even after the ladies left us, the men swallowed their wine as though we were all drinking it to the solemn memory of our week’s holiday, now alas! coming to an end. Nor were we any better off when we joined the ladies. My Aunt was watching Arethusa, and Arethusa was watching Mary Harbury, who with exemplary patience had got out a fresh piece of canvas, and was hard at work again on her sampler.

My Aunt tried to get Mary Harbury to play, but she said she would not unless Arethusa played too; and Arethusa said she wouldn’t, and so there was no music. Altogether the week’s holiday was likely to come to an end as dull as ditch-water.

At last I said in despair:

‘I say, Twentyman, you never told us a story the other night. Have you none to tell?’

‘No!’ said Twentyman; ‘nothing ever happens to me. You won’t believe it, I dare say, but I never had a dream in my life.’

‘But have you never heard a story that you can tell? I don’t mean Sinbad the Sailor, but something that happened to some one that you have known.’

‘I had an old nurse,’ said Twentyman, ‘who used to tell me stories by the score; I don’t mean lies, but stories like those you told the other night.’

‘Can’t you remember one?’ for I was resolved not to let the giant off.

‘Yes, I can,’ said Twentyman, ‘and here it is; but mind you I don’t vouch for it.

‘You must know my nurse was a Scotchwoman, and a staunch Presbyterian, and very fond of going to the Kirk. When I was young my father lived in Scotland, and that was how I had a Scotch nurse. This old nurse told me what I am going to tell you, but it happened to her grandmother, not to herself. In Scotland you know they are great people for praying, and towards the new year,—they don’t keep Christmas,—they are praying almost all day long. Well, this old grandmother of my nurse was very religious,—I

suppose it ran in the family, as my nurse was religious too,—and one year she thought she would go to an early service which the minister was going to have in the Kirk. So she went to bed betimes, that she might be up early, and she got up in the dark, and away she went with her plaid about her down the street to the Kirk at the town end—I think the town was the town of Pittenweem—trudging through the snow in the bitter cold. Well, she got to the Kirk all right, though it was quite dark, and glad she was when she saw the lights in the chilly winter's morning. When she got to the Kirk she walked straight to her place, and sat down and looked round, and then she said she felt so scared, for though it seemed that she knew many of the congregation, she could scarce remember when or where she had seen them last. Some she had never seen before, and could not tell whence they came, though she knew every one in the town. Then the Minister got into the pulpit and gave out a psalm, and all the congregation sang it to a wild, old-fashioned tune. The Minister then got up and prayed, and after he had prayed he read a chapter of the Bible and expounded it, and she said she had never heard better doctrine. After that he prayed again, then they sang another psalm, and last of all came the sermon, which was very

good. All the while she wondered where she had seen the Minister before, for his face was not at all strange, only it was so pale and wan, and the man himself was so thin and haggard, it was a marvel his clothes clung to his body. Well, while she was wondering, she felt some one pull her plaid behind, and then a voice came, like a voice from a tomb, from a woman that was sitting behind her : “Elsie ! Elsie !”—that was my old nurse’s grandmother’s name, you know —“gang your gate at once. This is our service, and we are all the dead, who have our services just as the living have theirs. Dinna look round, but gang your way straight out of the Kirk, without looking left or right, else you may be torn to pieces, for good and bad come to Death’s Kirk just as they do to the Kirk o’ God ?”

“You may fancy,” said my nurse, “my grandmother was not slow to take the warning, and yet she did not run till she got out at the Kirk door, and then she ran up the street, and all the while she swore a pack of the dead ran after her and tried to tear her plaid off her back, but she got home safe ; and I have seen that plaid many a time, it was a Royal Stuart tartan ; and when it was worn out as a plaid my father had it for a waist-coat. When my grandmother got home she looked at the clock, and saw it was not three

o'clock, and that she must have got up and gone to that service of the dead between one and two."

'That was my old nurse's story, and she used to tell it in a way that would make your flesh creep. She said her grandmother recollected the Minister, and that he had been dead more than fifty years when she went to that service.'

'A very ghastly, grisly story,' said Aunt Mandeville. 'I am sure Mr. Twentyman that is not the only story your old nurse told you.'

'Oh, no,' said the giant. 'She used to tell me many more, only I never thought you would care to hear them.'

It seemed that story-telling was infectious, for the Count now offered to tell us one. Yes! we were all ready to hear it.

'This story,' he began, 'comes from the coast of East Prussia, on the Baltic, and it's all about seals. I don't know if you do know that all along that coast there are numbers of seals. Now the seal is an animal which is supposed to be "uncanny." It is supposed to be a beast, and something more. The fishermen fancy they are men when they please, and seals when they please; that they can take either shape at pleasure. You have all heard of were-wolves, I daresay. Well! these seals up the Baltic are were-seals, for, as you all know, "were" only means man.'

Here Major Plunger nodded his head, though whether it were from an attack of sleep, or to show his approbation of what the Count was saying, was not evident.

‘Along that coast, too,’ the Count proceeded, ‘there are numberless islands—the land is fringed with an archipelago, as it were—most of them uninhabited, on which the fishers land to dry their nets. Well! one day a young fisherman of one of the villages on the Frische Haf—that’s the name of a great lagoon up there—was rowing home by moonlight, when he saw a lot of people dancing on an islet, and as he knew there were no people living on it he pulled in to see what it was all about. As his boat grated on the sandy shore down ran all the dancers to the sea, and then he saw that they were all women. Some old and some young, some ugly and some pretty. He saw, too, that, as each of them reached the shore she caught up a sealskin that was lying there, threw it across her shoulders, became a seal on the spot, and waddled away into the water.

‘He was a bold fellow, our fisherman, and knew what to do. He just threw himself into the way of the youngest and prettiest of the party, seized her sealskin, and kept it out of her sight, and so she could not take her seal-shape, but was forced to remain a woman.

‘ Well, she cried, and bewailed, and begged so prettily to have her sealskin back, but it was no good. The lad was unmarried and in want of a wife, so he put her into his boat and rowed home with her. You may fancy how amazed his father and mother were to see the lading which their son had brought back with him. At first the lassie was very sulky, and would hardly take to them at all, though she could speak what they call German in those parts, quite as well or better than any of them. For some time they wished to have her baptized, but she said she had been baptized before by her own parson in the Baltic, so they had her confirmed instead, and I daresay that did quite as well.

‘ After that she got quite happy, and seemed to forget the sea altogether, and they grew very fond of her. I told you the young man was in want of a wife, and so, as his father and mother were willing, he was married to the seal-wife, who had no nasty cow’s tail to drop off when the blessing was given, like the lassie of whom I told you the other night.

‘ In due time they had children—one, two, three,—in fact, I can’t tell how many: and there was not a happier or handsomer pair all round the Frische Haf than Eric and Asmunda.

‘ I must tell you that along that coast all the

farmsteads are down close to the sea, and that our fishermen are farmers also. One day, when the barley was ripe, and Eric was busy reaping it, his wife was sitting indoors, and the children were playing about in the byre. It so happened that one of them went to an old chest that stood in the barn, and threw up the lid and peeped into it. There he saw an old moth-eaten piece of fur—an old sealskin, in fact—the very sealskin which Eric had tossed away into the chest the night he came home with Asmunda.

‘Away ran the child with the sealskin to its mother.

“See here, mother, what I have found in the barn.”

“Give it to me,” said the mother; “this is what I have been waiting for ever since I came here.”

‘And without another word she threw it across her shoulders, and waddled away down to the water in her old seal-shape.

‘Eric saw that there was some stir in the house, and, besides, he heard the children screaming, for they were frightened out of their wits, as you may fancy. He ran back to the house, and down to the water’s edge, only just in time to see Asmunda swim off. He called out to her, and asked her how she could have the heart to leave

him and her children there on land, and go off to sea; but she told him that she had been married to a seal-husband before she had been wedded to him, that her seal-husband and his children were waiting for her just outside the surf, and with those words she dived into the water and disappeared.'

'Well,' said I, 'there is nothing new under the sun. Scatterbrains told me he had heard that very same story in Shetland, and I would have told it you myself, only I thought it too wonderful.'

'Have seals souls?' asked Arethusa.

'Who can tell?' answered the Count. 'It is clear they can be constant and faithful, for here this seal-wife went on loving her old husband in the sea, and lost not a moment in rejoining him as soon as she got back her sealskin.'

'What I want to know,' said Colonel Chichester, 'is whether that would be looked on as bigamy amongst the seals. As they have their parsons and their marriages, I daresay they have their courts, civil and ecclesiastical. It would be a nice question for some of their lawyers, whether it was a crime for her to have married Eric.'

'There can be no crime in doing anything under duress,' said I, and I looked hard at Arethusa, as much as to say: 'Never fear, I am not going to marry Mary Harbury against my will.'

‘Now I think, young ladies,’ said Aunt Mandeville, ‘we may as well depart before we hear any more of these wild tales, or we shall have both of you walking in your sleep. Good night, Edward. Don’t forget to follow Count Manteuffel’s wise example, and bolt your door before going to bed.’

Yes! I did bolt it, as soon as I went upstairs; but I did not go to bed for hours, thinking how I might best have it out with Aunt Mandeville on Monday. One thing, however, I beg you all to believe, I dearly loved my Aunt, and in anything else I would have given up my life for her; but I looked on her determination to marry me to Mary as something altogether abhorrent to human nature, as a sort of slave-trade, and worse than slave-trade, inasmuch as it dealt with souls instead of bodies. ‘No,’ I said to myself, for at least the thousandth time, ‘I will not marry Mary Harbury, and I will marry Arethusa Chichester.’

CHAPTER XIV.

SUNDAY AT MANDEVILLE HALL.

NEXT day was Sunday. How sweet was that day of rest! How happy I was not to have to go out shooting! And what a Sunday of Sundays it was!

‘Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky.’

It was all that old George Herbert says. What a pity we must take him along with us, and add:

‘The dew shall weep thy fall to-night,
For thou must die.’

I woke early; for I was vexed at all that happened, and with every one except Arethusa. I could not sleep. I threw open the window, and saw all the park bathed in the clear, fresh morning light. There was scarcely a breath of air stirring, and all around me spoke ‘peace.’

I remembered the text, ‘There is no peace for the wicked.’ Had I been wicked?—was it wicked-

ness to be constant to the woman I loved, and who returned my love? No! I could not think it. Strong in that conviction, I dressed and went down. There was Aunt Mandeville, looking as calm and peaceful as the day itself. A thorough Sunday Auntie. There were all the guests, except Major Plunger,—he always overslept himself. Then Aunt Mandeville read those short prayers in her sweet, low voice, which seemed to find you out, in whatever corner of the hall you might be kneeling, and to speak to you, and reason with you, and you alone. She was a model of serious and yet cheerful piety; quite unlike Madam Harbury, whose prayers were twice as long, twice as severe, and only half as effectual.

We all got up the better; even Brooks was better. Then we had breakfast, at which Aunt Mandeville would allow no light or worldly talk. She said we ought to be preparing ourselves for church,—not by reading ‘The Whole Duty of Man,’—that hideous black book which Madam Harbury always had in her hand—but by doing the whole duty of man, by thought and reflection, and repentance for any sins we might have committed. She was never much of a catechiser or crucifier. No! Aunt Mandeville thought that, as sin came from within, so repentance should begin there. ‘You might as well blister a stone,’ she

said, 'as lecture people whose own hearts do not tell them what sinners they have been.' Perhaps this was only another way of saying that 'as the tree falls, so it must lie,' and 'that every man must bear his own cross;' but, at any rate, it was a pleasant way of saying it.

After breakfast we walked about a little on the terrace, or loitered about the park, on the way to the old church, which, as I told you, we had restored long before. Aunt Mandeville was never late for church. It was a thing she could not bear. 'If it is a great breach of good breeding to be late for dinner,' she used to say, 'what is it to be late in coming to the House of God, to which all, high and low, rich and poor, are specially invited?'

But she was never too early. She was never later in taking her seat in that green baize pew—which had so offended the Mercian archæologists—than five minutes before eleven; but I do not think there was any one in the parish who could remember to have seen her there ten minutes before that hour. That she called waste of time.

'It is possible to waste time on Sundays, just as much as on other days,' she used to say.

And now we are all at the church-door—I between Arethusa and Mary Harbury, the Count

with my Aunt, and the inseparables—the Major and Twentyman—keeping close together. Aunt Mandeville goes in first, as it were to marshal us and lead the way. There is room for us all in the green baize pew, and five minutes after we are seated the simple service begins with the morning hymn. It was the good old-fashioned Church of England service. The psalms—much as it may horrify some of the rising generation—were read, not intoned or chanted. Only the versicles at the end of each psalm were sung by the school children. In short, there was very little singing throughout the service, except at the regular times, and then more psalms were sung than hymns, and very often the Old Version instead of the New. We used to sing the *Venite exultemus*, but we never sung the *Te Deum* or the *Jubilate*. There was an organ and an organist, and the children sang well; for both Auntie and Mr. St. Faith had good ears, and insisted that whatever was sung should be sung well.

I do not think I ever heard any one read the Liturgy better than Mr. St. Faith. He read it in a good honest, English voice; not in that half-apologetic Oxford voice, that seems to say: ‘I am ashamed of the Church of England and her Liturgy. Forgive me, for I am only here for a little while—a bird of passage on its way to Rome.’

He read fast, too, but he did not gabble. His reading of the Lessons was perfect; not at all that monotonous sing-song which our Ritualists call reading.

What about his preaching? That is an unkind question. Have I not already told you Mr. St. Faith was a bad preacher? When he came to utter his own conceptions, his natural modesty seemed to overpower him, and he champed and chewed his words till he made a sad hash of them. It was not that the sermons were bad. If they had been written down and printed they would have been thought good, as when he preached an ordination sermon, and the Bishop asked him to have it printed. Then every one said, 'What a good sermon! Do you think Mr. St. Faith wrote it himself?' In this he was like Dr. Howley—some time Archbishop of Canterbury—whose speeches were a fearful infliction, because of his fastidiousness in choosing his words; but when you saw them printed, they were excellent, for though he was long in finding a word, he did at last find the right one. So it was with Mr. St. Faith; it was his delivery—and not his matter—that was contemptible.

What did he preach on that day? I recollect it well. When the sermon came I remember looking out through the open church-door, away

into the park beyond, and wishing I were with Arethusa under a broad-spreading oak that stood there. The freshness of the early morning had passed away into the mid-day heat of September, and we had every window and door in the church open.

Ah! you do not remember the text, or you would not try to take us with you across the park under that oak. I do remember it, and here it is: ‘And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man!’ You will say that it was hard to preach a bad sermon on such a text; but it was not a good sermon. Mr. St. Faith, it seemed to me, was trying all the time to find an excuse for David. He wanted to shield the man after God’s own heart, when he had done the foulest and most cruel crime; but he did not make much of it. He was like an advocate who has no case and abuses the opposite attorney. In this case Mr. St. Faith attacked the devil, who had been permitted to tempt David till he had fallen, and he made such an onslaught on him and so entirely threw the blame on him, that one would have thought David had been as much a mere tool in the hand of the father of lies, as I had been—according to Madam Harbury—in saving her daughter’s life.

Perhaps I was more inclined to criticise the sermon, because in no sense could I feel that ‘I

was the man.' I could have said with as much sincerity as Samuel: 'Whose pet lamb have I stolen.' I beg you all to believe that I had never thought of any such wickedness. That's what you can all say, you say. Well! I am heartily glad to hear it. In these days, I suppose, pet lambs 'that lie in a man's bosom' are never stolen; the royal race of Davids has died out. Again I say, I am glad to hear it. Then, I cared little about it. It never occurred to me that I could steal any one's lamb, still less that any one would steal my pet lamb, my own Arethusa, away from me. That they would have 'no pity,' as David himself put it so touchingly. Perhaps I felt so strong, and sure, and safe. Perhaps I trusted so thoroughly in myself, that I thought I—I alone would be able to avenge any such injury, and visit the offenders with worse vengeance than overtook David.

Whatever it was, I did not like the sermon, and was glad when the munched and masticated discourse was over.

Then we had a psalm, the Old Hundredth, and Morning Service at Mandeville church was over.

I think it shocking in a young person of either sex not to feel better and happier after going to church. I know some of your old sinners will say that young and old alike are only glad because the service is over. That is quite a mistake. The

satisfaction young minds feel is at having done a duty. It is no pleasure to you. You have either done it or not done it so often that that you are hardened and callous; but the case is quite otherwise with young blood. I say again, all young people feel happy after church. How the old feel I do not care to know; nor does it much matter. The tree leans the way it will lie even before it falls. Who cares how such warped and twisted hearts feel?

But there is one feeling which both young and old share after church.' If they are in good health, they are always hungry. We were always hungry, famishing, after church at Mandeville Hall. What luncheons we used to eat, and how Brooks gloried all the while! It was so respectable; all for the good of the house.

When luncheon was over, Aunt Mandeville, between the churches—yes! if you did not like going to church twice on Sunday; if you grudged God three hours out of the holy twenty-four once-a-week, you had better not come to Mandeville Hall—between the churches, I say, Auntie used to go down to the school and see the children, after they had eaten their dinner. She always gave them a dinner, roast beef and plum-pudding, on Sunday! 'Poor little things,' she used to say, 'I can't bear to have them catechised before morning service. It is all very well for us, who have

had a good breakfast, to go and make them repeat the Lord's Prayer and pray for their daily bread, when some of them have not had perhaps a morsel to eat. No! they tell us it's ill jesting with a hungry man. I say it's ill catechising a hungry child. Let us put some life into them first with their dinner, and then let us see what their religion is like.'

Was not all this downright shocking of Aunt Mandeville? In Ireland they would call it 'meal-tub religion;' but those days were not these days, and Mandeville parish was not Ireland, and never likely to be, I hope. But whether you think Aunt Mandeville's ways shocking or not, they were her ways, and she had persuaded all the children in the parish to follow them.

'Give me the children,' said some one—or if some one has not said it, some one ought to have said it—'give me the children, and I don't care who has the parents.' Aunt Mandeville certainly had all the children. I don't suppose there was a child in the parish who did not bless her.

Then, when she asked them questions, she put them so fairly and so tenderly. She was not always trying to catch and trip up Betty Briggs, 'our' naughty little girl who never could understand the difference between an 'outward and visible sign' and 'an inward and spiritual grace.'

Betty's parents had migrated from Harbury into Mandeville parish, and Betty had not been two weeks at school before she said, 'Lawk! what a differ there be atween Madam Harbury and Mrs. Mandeville! I never can learn them answers in the Catechism; but when Mrs. Mandeville tells me how naughty I am, it makes me cry; whereas, when Madam Harbury did scold me, I used to laugh.'

Yes! Aunt Mandeville understood children, and knew how to manage them.

From the school we went to church—not to hear another sermon; there was only one sermon on Sunday at Mandeville Church, morning and evening, turn and turn about. This I know is enough to make some of us moderns die of disgust; but there had never been more than one sermon in that church on Sunday in the memory of man, and there is not more than one now. Was the parish any the worse for it? I trow not; and of one thing I am sure, Mr. St. Faith's one sermon was a deal better than his two would have been.

After the prayers, the children were catechised in a plain, straightforward way, and church was over in Mandeville parish till that day week.

'What!' says Mr. Rabid Rubrick, 'were the saints' days never kept?' No, they were not; an awful state of things, certainly. I have known a

saint's day in London on which a sermon was preached by a clergyman who was a widower to two widows, they being the whole congregation,—about Ruth's story,—that is, about two widows. I am not quite sure that the time of the widower and the two widows was not wasted on that saint's day, but perhaps they liked to waste their time.

No; in Mandeville Church the great feasts and fasts of the church were kept, and religiously kept, and the days of the apostles; but the days of St. Etheldreda, and St. Machutus, and St. Swithin, and Edward King and Martyr, and St. Dunstan, and St. Thomas of Canterbury, were not kept, though some people would now be very glad to keep them.

Then, after evening church, you will, some of you, be surprised to hear that we felt happier and better for the second service. Between that and dinner we took, all of us together, a Sabbath-day's stroll about the park, walking slowly and lazily in a body, and cheering ourselves with rational talk. One great sign of those times was that there was so much wheat in conversation, and so little chaff. Modern conversation is very like the burlesques which have invaded the stage, and seem to consist in a string of one hundred bad puns and jokes in a minute; as if one good joke was not worth a hundred bad ones, or one true orient pearl was not worth a thousand base French imitations.

Yes, on that Sunday we all went along the river bank. Arethusa would show them all the pool where we had been fishing when Mary Harbury fell in, just below the pool, at a spot where the river bed fell rapidly, gathering strength before the mill-race.

‘Here it was,’ she said; ‘look, there are the marks of Mary’s feet as she slipped down the steep bank; and there is the foot-bridge a little lower down, over which I crossed. How frightened I was!’

‘Yes,’ said Aunt Mandeville, ‘it was a lucky escape—a providential escape, I ought to say, for at all times and in all places we are in God’s hand.’

Then she went up to Mary, and kissed her; and Arethusa kissed her, too, and called her ‘dear Mary.’

As we men could not kiss each other, we stood idly by. I do not know what we should have done had not Twentyman seen a fat trout basking, and thrown a big stone at him. It made such a splash that we were all frightened. Then we all laughed, and turned, and went slowly back to the Hall.

The dinner? Yes, the dinner was a cheerful meal. Still there was no light talk, no stories of birds bagged, or hares slain; but genial, happy, pleasant conversation. We all seemed to feel in love and charity with all men. Mr. St. Faith dined

with us. Whenever he was at the Rectory, and we were at the Hall, he dined with us every Sunday. It was as much a matter of course as either the morning or evening service. He always sat by Aunt Mandeville's side, and he never failed to tell her of any good work to be done in the parish. Ah! you will say, 'a regular begging impostor.' Mr. St. Faith was nothing of the kind; but he thought that Charity began at home, that Aunt Mandeville's duty was to the poor about her, on whom, as the money was spent under her own eyes, she could be sure it was really spent on the objects for which her bounty was intended. No! Mr. St. Faith never begged beyond his parish. Madam Harbury used to say indeed that his lukewarmness in doing the Lord's work was shameful. 'Why, Mr. Knagger had sent out a thousand Bibles to the benighted Circassians, not to mention his efforts for the conversion of the Jews. She would be glad to know what Mr. St. Faith had done in the same way.'

Poor Madam Harbury! She little knew, what I have since known, that the benighted Circassians only valued the Bibles because the calfskin binding of the Bible Society made such good cartouche-boxes. The inside they converted into cartridges to use against the Russians.

On that Sunday, while Mr. St. Faith was busy

telling Auntie that old Tom Thornycroft's cottage was a disgrace to the village, and that if something were not soon done to it, it must tumble about his ears, that the school wanted a new playground for the boys, and the whole premises thorough draining—to all of which Aunt Mandeville assented, as she always assented, to everything of that sort that the rector suggested—while they were determining good works to be done in the village, Count Manteuffel, who was on Auntie's other side, had to talk to some one, and he talked to Arethusa. Did I grudge him his conversation? Not in the least. As Arethusa allowed me to talk to Mary Harbury, and even took her to her bosom as soon as she was no longer afraid of her, so the Count was quite welcome to talk too with Arethusa, for I had no fear of him. He wanted her to talk of the White Lady, but this Arethusa most decidedly negatived.

‘No! I do not wish to speak of her. Besides, Mrs. Mandeville does not like it. It is Sunday too.’

What he said after that rebuff I cannot tell. Colonel Chichester had got into a theological dispute with Major Plunger. They had been talking of the sermon, and the Major said, how well Nathan put the punishment that was to fall on David on the ground that he had ‘no pity.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the Colonel. ‘It was

not Nathan, but David, who used those words. Then when the Major said he could not see how David could have used them, Colonel Chichester called across the table to me :

‘Is it not so, Halfacre? Is it not David, and not Nathan, who uses the words because “he had no pity.” You are fresh from Oxford and can tell us. Mr. St. Faith is too much occupied with Mrs. Mandeville.’

Yes! I knew the text. I have told you already that I know the Bible almost by heart. It was no trouble for me therefore to say :

‘And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man ; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth the man that hath done this shall surely die. And he shall restore the lamb four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.’

‘Quite like a book,’ said Twentyman. ‘What a memory you have got, Halfacre!’

Yes! a memory! After that I began to muse, and wondered what good it would be, when a man’s own pet lamb was stolen from him, to give him four other lambs instead of it. As if fifty lambs would be at all the same to him as that one pet lamb which lay ‘in his bosom and was unto him as a daughter.’

And so between musing and wonder on that

particular kind of sheep-stealing the dinner came to an end. The ladies retired, and we soon joined them. Then we had some sacred music. Aunt Mandeville was very fond of Handel. I remember that both Arethusa and Mary Harbury played some pieces of his composition. 'Angels ever bright and fair' was what Arethusa played, and that chorus out of Judas, 'Wise men flattering may deceive you.' Yes, it was all very peaceful and happy. That still Sunday had come like oil upon the troubled waters. But it was bed-time. The day of rest was over, and we all went to sleep with renewed strength for the troubles of the week to come.

Observe! Not one word of love had I spoken to Arethusa all that day.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW I HAD IT OUT WITH AUNT MANDEVILLE.

You will not believe me, for I see you look upon me as a weak, vacillating nature, but next day, on Monday, after breakfast, I did really have it out with Aunt Mandeville. It was the most memorable moment of my life, and I dwell upon it certainly not without pleasure at my own resolution, though with remorse, even after this distance of time, at having been the cause of so much pain to one of the best of women.

I remember she was seated at her davenport table, looking over her letters, when I knocked at the door and went in.

It was about eleven o'clock, and it added to my pain to see that Aunt Mandeville thought I was coming to tell her that I had proposed to Mary Harbury and been accepted.

'Well, Edward,' she said, looking up with one of her sweetest smiles, 'you have done what I wished, and spoken to Mary Harbury, and now all will go well.'

‘No, indeed, Aunt, I have not yet spoken to Miss Harbury; nor do I like to speak to her till I have asked you one question.’

‘Ask it, my dear boy. I am sure any question that I can answer, or anything that I can do for you and Mary, will be a real pleasure to me.’

The dear thing thought, I believe, that I was come to ask her to make some further allowance, and that it was a question of settlements, or some other of those horrid lawyers’ devices, to render marriage as odious and quarrelsome a matter as possible, instead of being, as it ought to be, the smoothest and softest step in the world.

‘It is not anything I want you to do, Auntie; you have done too much for me already, and I have been very undutiful and very ungrateful to you. It is only one question which I want you to answer.’

‘Ask it then, child,’ said Aunt Mandeville, getting alarmed at my serious face.

‘Do you agree with Lady Meredith in thinking that I am bound in honour to marry the girl for whom I meant those verses?’

‘Certainly I do. Lady Meredith only expressed my feelings, though, as I must say she always does, in much better words.’

‘Then, Auntie, I am sorry to say I cannot marry Mary Harbury, for those verses were written and meant for Arethusa Chichester.’

Now, perhaps, you will think that when she heard this declaration, which must have taken her as much by surprise as a stray bullet finding its billet in a soldier's heart, Aunt Mandeville burst out into a fury, and so far justified that description of her by my old nurse, with which this truthful story began. Whatever she might have been on the day I was born, whether she really had been neither 'to hand nor to bind,' I cannot say, but she had never been demonstrative in her anger all the time I was with her. Though it was plain she felt deeply on this occasion, when her dearest hopes were rudely dashed to the ground, she showed no temper; all she said was:

'Leave me now, Edward; we will talk of this another time;' and she said it so softly that it might have been the answer to a most indifferent question. But for all that I knew she only felt it the more.

I must say, too, I was disappointed in my turn. I meant to have had it out, and to have settled the matter then and there; to have declared to my Aunt that I not only would not marry Mary Harbury, but that I would marry Arethusa Chichester. I meant, in short, to have known my fate, and to have drawn some declaration of her intentions from my Aunt in return. But now everything was still in abeyance, except that I had

undeceived Aunt Mandeville as to her delusion about the verses. All that was positive was that the verses were Arethusa's, and not Mary's, and that I had, by a Socratic process, extracted a positive declaration from her that a young man who could write such verses to a young lady was bound in honour to marry her.

Observe here the inconsequence of the female mind. So long as Aunt Mandeville thought the verses and the passion they expressed were excited by the charms of Mary Harbury, she was ready to forgive them and me, because she had set her heart on my marrying Mary; but as soon as ever she knew that it was Arethusa's influence over me that had drawn them forth, she thought them infamous and horrid, and wondered how I could have sunk so low as to write them.

But, consequent or inconsequent, she wished me to leave her, and I left her to herself, while I went to look for Arethusa. As good luck would have it Mary Harbury was writing a letter to her mother, no doubt describing the great progress she had made with the new sampler; the gentlemen were packing up their things, or playing billiards; but Arethusa was in the conservatory, under the Passion Flower.

‘I have been waiting here for you to know my fate, Edward, and I read it in your eyes. I see

you have had it out with Aunt Mandeville, and that she knows all. I see, too, that she will not hear of our marriage.'

'Don't jump to conclusions, dearest; all my Aunt knows at present is that you are the object of my affections, and that those unhappy verses were meant for you, and not for Mary Harbury. I could not tell her anything more, because she desired me to leave her alone, and so I left her alone, and have come to you.'

'All that she knows is that I am the object of your affections; quite enough for her to know. I mean quite enough to destroy any hopes of our union. I tell you, Edward!'—and here Arethusa turned on me as fiercely as if it were all my fault—'Mrs. Mandeville will never give her consent; she will never forgive me for having been the innocent cause of overthrowing her plans. With me as your wife the Harbury and Mandeville lands will never be united. She will never see them in a ring fence with me as her daughter-in-law.'

'And what does it signify if she does not? Am I bound to the soil like a middle-age serf? Am I not free to choose whom I will for my wife? Am I to be tied to Aunt Mandeville's apron-string all my life? Can I not love you—ay, and work for you? Say that you will have me, Arethusa, without Mandeville Hall—only for my own self—and I

will let the dead bury their dead? Aunt Mandeville shall never make me marry any other woman than you, and she may leave Mandeville Hall to Mary Harbury or Major Plunger, if she pleases.'

'Spoken like a man, Edward,' said Arethusa; 'like the man who jumped into the Avon to save the woman whom he did not love, merely because it was his duty to do so. If you really mean what you say, we may defy fortune and be happy;' and then, as she went on, she drew just a little closer to me, and said: 'But can I really trust you? And when will you show me those verses which, according to your Aunt and Lady Meredith, contain the whole gospel of love, and yet are so good when meant for Mary Harbury, and so wicked when meant for me.'

'You can trust me, dearest; I will promise you that.' Then after a little pause, which you may all fill up as you please: 'Another thing I will promise you, and that is, you shall never see those verses, of which I am heartily ashamed, till we are married.'

'How provoking!' said Arethusa. 'I believe, after all, they were meant for Mary Harbury, and that's why you will not show them to me.'

'Tell me another thing,' I interposed; 'has the Passion-Flower withered away, or is it bright and green, and blooming?'

‘It is as bright as ever. I hope it may never wither,’ was the sweet reply, just murmured through rosy lips.

So there we sat in great love and joy under the Passion Flower, caring for nothing under the sun but our two selves, and utterly indifferent as to what Aunt Mandeville thought, or of what became of Mandeville Hall, so we two might love one another.

The afternoon came, and the Count and the Heavies departed. No one could have guessed for a moment, to look at Aunt Mandeville, that anything had happened to ruffle her temper. She was as graceful and courteous as ever, remarkably so to Colonel Chichester and Arethusa, and when the gentlemen departed she said to Count Manteuffel, with a most winning smile, that she should be most happy to welcome him as an offshoot of the old Mandevilles whenever he chose to pay her a visit.

‘That I certainly will not fail to do,’ said the Count, ‘as I shall be in hunting-quarters at Leamington all the winter.’

When they were all gone—the Chichesters, you know, and Mary Harbury were to stay longer,—Arethusa said she wanted to speak to her father about a letter to Aunt Buller, Mary Harbury disappeared, and I was left alone with Aunt Mandeville.

‘I have something to say to you, Edward,’ said my Aunt, with a low but firm voice.

‘What is it, Auntie?’

‘I have been thinking over what you said this morning;’ then, with a little trembling of her voice, she went on: ‘I need not say how grieved I am to find myself so mistaken—I might say deceived,—for you know when I asked you in town whether there was anything “between” you and Miss Chichester, you said no: it seems you have been making love to her ever so long behind my back.’

She paused, and gave me time to put in a word.

‘Not ever so long, Auntie. I indeed have felt drawn towards Miss Chichester for many months, —ever since we were at Ilfracombe in fact, but when you asked me that question in town I answered truly that there was nothing “between us,” for up to that time I was ignorant of the state of Miss Chichester’s feelings, and I had no reason to suppose till she came here that my love was returned.’

‘See what harm may be done in a week,’ said my Aunt, forgetting that the fire which had been smouldering for months had only broken out when it found air.

Then she went on: ‘And are all my plans

for your welfare and the good of the estate to be thwarted because one pretty girl takes your fancy instead of another? What fault have you to find with Mary Harbury?’

‘None; but I do not care for her well enough to marry her. I do not care one bit for her.’

‘Very ungrateful, after saving her life.’

‘That was my misfortune, not my fault. I don’t wish that Miss Harbury had been drowned, but I do wish that the miller or Colonel Chichester—any one rather than myself—had dragged her out.’

‘Well!’ said my Aunt, not at all relenting—in fact behaving very unkindly, as I thought—‘it is a bad business. Circumstances, every circumstance indeed, since you have been here have so thrown Mary Harbury and you together, that I thought Providence was bringing about in a wonderful way what I will confess has been the darling scheme of my life. It was a pleasure—a pleasure none can know who has not been alone and childless like myself—to see you and Mary growing up together side by side, and to say, “One day they shall be man and wife;” and it is a pang to feel that the only obstacle to the fulfilment of my purpose comes from you, from whom, if from any one in the world, I have the right to expect a dutiful submission to my desires. Were I disposed to be a tyrant, I

might say marry Mary Harbury, or cease to be heir to Mandeville Hall ; but I am not so hard-hearted, though I will never give my consent to your marriage with Arethusa Chichester. I will leave you time to reflect and change your mind. When the Chichesters leave, the baneful influence to which you are subjected will grow weaker, and you will then see that the step which I desire you to take is for your own good. Edward, I say, let bygones be bygones. Forget Arethusa, as I am willing to forget your deceit in making advances to her without my knowledge, and let us ever be the dear friends we were a short year ago, and which we should still have been were it not for this unfortunate acquaintance.'

After delivering this oration—for it was a downright oration for Aunt Mandeville to utter—I suppose I made some impatient gesture of dissent to the proposition for giving up Arethusa, and as I was going to speak, Aunt Mandeville stopped me :

'I think you had better say nothing more about it now ; I know your mind, and you know mine. In three months from this date I expect you to be of another mind. If you are not, it will be time enough then to discuss the matter further.'

But it was not in human nature not to protest. I was better than a worm. Why should I not have a worm's right,—the right to turn?

‘Auntie,’ I said, ‘after three months, or thirty years, you will find me just the same. I love Arethusa Chichester, and I loathe Mary Harbury.’

‘The same thing has been said some million times, my dear Edward, since love first came into the world; but after all how few ever marry their first love, and what misery would it often be to them if they did!’

There was no use saying any more. Aunt Mandeville evidently did not believe in my constancy, or in the sincerity of my affections. She thought it a mere boyish passion. The only way to convince her was not by talking, but by deeds. Time, dear old Time, who is so much better to us than we deserve, who is so just as well as so generous, would show. I resolved to leave the matter in his hands, little doubting that he would convince my Aunt.

I left her then, and paced up and down the hall, in a vacant mood. By-and-bye Arethusa tripped along with a letter in her hand. I never, no, I never saw her looking half so lovely.

‘Do you know what this letter is written for?’

‘How should I?’

‘I’ll tell you then. It is written to Aunt Buller to say that we are going to start the day after to-morrow to pay her another visit. Of course I think, and Papa thinks too, that we oughtn’t to

stay here any longer after what has passed. I always told you he would do whatever I liked. you needn't be afraid of him, Edward. So by his desire, and with my own will'—she said this resolutely—'I have written to beg Aunt Buller to find some excuse for our going to her. Dear good creature, she is sure to find one.' Then in a far tenderer voice: 'We shall have to part, Edward, you know, but perhaps it won't be for long. Papa is really coming back to Leamington to hunt this winter; and though I am sure your Aunt will never care to see me in this house again, it will be if I am so near, and we don't meet sometimes, hard Edward.'

'Going away, Arethusa! Why, you were to stay a month!'

'You silly fellow! I know we were; but don't you see we can't stay here any longer when your Aunt dislikes me so, and when you have confessed your love for me, and she will not hear of it?'

'And will you really go, Arethusa?'

'We have no other course. Don't be afraid; we shall go as quietly as we came, and your Aunt will part with us seemingly as good friends as when we came; but don't deceive yourself, this is the last time I shall ever set my feet in Mandeville Hall so long as your Aunt lives: and may she live many years!'

‘And what am I to do, Arethusa? What are we to do?’

‘We are to be good and love one another, and hope to see one another, and pray that your Aunt’s heart may turn, though I fear we shall find it as hard as Pharaoh’s; alas! the days of miracles are past. We must think of one another very often, and be constant. Above all things, you are to trust me with all your heart, as I trust you with mine. There, don’t come so close to me, or I shall burst out crying.’

I am afraid this is a very doleful, heart-breaking chapter, and no doubt any mother who has an undutiful daughter, will make her read it out aloud over and over again, in order that she may see the misery of any young person having a will of her own; and how sinful it is to have a feeling heart, and how sin is always followed by sorrow. I am afraid, though, for all that, young hearts will go on loving much the same as they have always loved, till Doomsday; and as for the dolefulness of this chapter, I don’t see how it can be anything else.

If you have ever loved, fancy what it is for two young and loving hearts—knowing no law but their own—to be suddenly torn asunder, just as they have grown together, and made to bleed, because one of them will not grow towards another heart in the opposite direction; and all for what—

that two estates may be brought within a ring fence. Oh, Aunt Mandeville! Aunt Mandeville! good, and kind, and gentle as you were in everything else, what misery you caused by your predestinating me, as though you were my Creator, to marry Mary Harbury!

Pray observe, too, dear reader—you have followed me now so long that I will call you ‘dear’—that all this while Mary Harbury has made no more sign of love or affection for me than if she had been a fish—could any of you have married a fish?—I mean a mammal fish, a whale, or a porpoise; fancy the cold, clammy, slimy fins of the bride or bridegroom;—who would be a fish’s bridesmaid, or his best man? who would perform the ceremony, assisted or unassisted, with full choral service or without? No! no parson, priest, or rabbi would do such a thing; and yet, Mary Harbury’s nature was that of fish, fishy. The only time when I saw a spark of genius in her was when she was walking in her sleep. What an awful condition for a husband to have a wife,—a great genius when she was asleep; how fitted she would have been to sit at the head of his table, or to go out with him to dinner. No! my advice to every one is, never marry a fish, not if you find a purse of sovereigns under her pillow every morning.

I say again that Mary Harbury was a fish—a fish in taking to the water—a fish in thanking me so coldly—a fish in being afraid to go into the Count's room; for fishes have no courage; a fish for walking in her sleep, and twice a fish for coming into my bedroom in that swimming way; a fish for walking about in the cold and damp,—do not eels glide about at night, much in the same 'uncanny' way: are not eels fish? Take my word for it, when eels walk at night, they are walking like Mary Harbury, in their sleep; ergo, Mary Harbury was a fish. She was a fish when she played—nay, worse than a fish; for dolphins are most musical, and saved the life of Arion; but Mary Harbury was not musical, and would have saved no man's life. No—she was altogether flat; flat as a flounder; cold as a cod-fish, and not at all unlike one about the eyes. I could never have married such a creature as a fish, and so I could never have married Mary Harbury.

I know it's a great shame to abuse her so, when she never did me any harm; but what will a lover not do when he is irritated, and when another girl steps between him and his love, and tries to take him away in spite of himself? At first, I was simply indifferent to her, the more so because Aunt Mandeville wanted to cram her down my throat; but when I saw that she was,

innocently or not, the cause of Arethusa's—my own darling Arethusa's — leaving the house, I looked upon her as an open enemy ; and so I have carried the war into her quarters, and abused her accordingly. Why she was ever born, I can't imagine, except to vegetate at home and vex me in particular.

There, I have abused her enough,—at least, for the present ; and as I see Arethusa and her coming down the staircase, we must be on our good behaviour, and very civil to her.

How that evening passed, I cannot tell. I know that Mr. and Mrs. Grubb, and Mr. St. Faith came to dinner, and that old Grubb was as vulgar as ever, and made some vile jokes, intermingled with allusions, singularly out of place, to the gossip that was going about the county as to my marriage with Mary Harbury. Thank Heaven ! he got no encouragement from Aunt Mandeville. Mary blushed, Arethusa frowned, and Mr. St. Faith and Colonel Chichester fell to talking about local taxation, or some other lively subject.

I sat next to Mrs. Grubb, between her and Mary Harbury, I remember, and she did once say :

‘La ! Mr. Halfacre ; and when is it to be ?’

‘What ?’

‘Why, your wedding with Miss H.’

‘All the world seems to know about it, except

myself. I advise you to ask the world when it is to be, and you may tell them that the two persons most concerned know nothing whatever of the matter.'

'La!' said Mrs. Grubb, apologetically: 'why, it's the talk of all Warwick and Leamington. I thought, from what Mrs. Mandeville said the other day, it was all a settled thing, and the day as good as fixed! I am sure I beg your pardon, Mr. Halfacre.'

'Freely granted, Mrs. Grubb; but do, there's a good soul; pray don't say anything more about it. There is not a word of truth in it.'

In the course of the evening Colonel Chichester told my Aunt, with infinite politeness and much circumlocution, that from something he had heard—in this respect imitating the policemen who, when they are describing the arrest of a thief, always plunge *in medias res*, with that phrase—from something he had heard, he should not be surprised if Arethusa and he were obliged to cut short their visit to Mandeville Hall, which had given them more pleasure than he could describe. Aunt Buller, in her last letter to Arethusa, had mentioned something which he was not at liberty to repeat, from which he had gathered that it might be necessary for them to return at once to Devonshire. Mrs. Mandeville must not take it unkindly

if they were forced to hurry away at a moment's warning. It all depended on the letters they might get by post.

To this most diplomatic speech Aunt Mandeville returned another quite as diplomatic, and almost as long as the oration which she had delivered to me in the morning. It had given her the greatest possible pleasure to welcome Colonel Chichester and Miss Chichester to Mandeville Hall. Their presence there had been a source of unmingled pleasure to her, and by them, what she feared would have been a very dull party, had been converted into a round of continual entertainment. No one would regret the departure of Miss Chichester more than Miss Harbury, who had found a companion delightfully suited to her years and character. She trusted that a lasting friendship might spring up between them, and that the two might often meet when Colonel and Miss Chichester were in that neighbourhood. In conclusion, she hoped that the anticipated summons from Aunt Buller would not be caused by any unpleasant occurrence.

‘There,’ whispered Arethusa, who was sitting close to me—I was not going to sit next Mrs. Grubb and Mary Harbury all the evening, and that when the hours of Arethusa’s stay were all numbered—‘There, just as I said—not a word

about sorrow at my departure, not a word of hope as to our return to Mandeville Hall.'

When this remarkable conversation was over, in which it was hard to say which of the two had told most white lies, Colonel Chichester or Aunt Mandeville, the whole sounding very much like those ministerial explanations called a 'cross' in modern parliamentary tactics, when the whole programme has been arranged before between the parties, and one on each side is put up merely to serve as a mouthpiece—when this was over, I say, there was a spasmodic attempt at general conversation, in which the unhappy Grubb, always destined to lead the forlorn hope, greatly distinguished himself. To be sure, his fate was very much that of forlorn hopes in general. He was beaten back shamefully; his scaling-ladders hurled down on his head as he lay sprawling in the ditch, the object of universal derision.

'What's all this,' he said, with the rashness of a man who feels his enterprise desperate—'what's all this I hear about the White Lady? The people down in the village say that she has appeared twice at Mandeville Hall in one week. You know that when she appears three times it betokens a death in the family.'

In vain Mrs. Grubb tried to stop him. 'Dear John, do hold your tongue.'

‘No, I won’t!’ said Mr. Grubb, showing a stupid obstinacy, suggestive of too much port, which indeed might have been guessed from his rubicund face—‘No, I won’t! I want to hear all about it. I appeal to you, Mr. Halfacre, for information. As a magistrate, I say the village ought not to be frightened by idle stories.’

‘Just what I say, Mr. Grubb,’ said Aunt Mandeville. ‘I am no magistrate, but I quite agree with you that the village ought not to be frightened by idle stories, and I shall be obliged to you if you will not spread them by taking any notice of them.’

‘But they say,’ went on the indomitable Grubb, who certainly deserved the Victoria Cross for gossip shown in the face of the enemy—‘they say the White Lady was seen by Mr. Halfacre, by Miss Harbury, and half-a-dozen of the servants; that she was seen carrying a lighted taper along the hall, and that they all gave chase, but she took refuge in the room in which Count Man—no, that’s not it—Count Toif—no, that’s not it either, but Count something—that tall, yellow-haired gentleman who was here the other night. Yes, in the very room in which he was sleeping—it being her own room in fact, and that when Mr. Halfacre and Miss Harbury, and all the servants rushed in, all they found was the taper on the

floor smoking, and the Count himself sound asleep in bed snoring. That's what the village says, and if it's not true it ought to be contradicted in the "Coventry Standard." Now, Mr. Halfacre, I want to know how much of that story is true, as you were present.'

'There's not a word of it true. Neither I nor Miss Harbury, nor any of the servants saw the White Lady, as you call her. So far from the Count's room being entered, the door was locked. I assure you there's no truth in what the village says, and it all arose out of a stupid mistake of two of the women-servants, who were coming home late from Stoneleigh Feast, and in their fright fancied they saw a great deal which never happened.'

'Dear me!' ejaculated Mrs. Grubb; 'what stories servants will tell. Why, we heard that all the servants at the Hall, Mr. Brooks and Mrs. Jellybag included, had given warning on account of the ghost. Dear Mrs. Mandeville, I really shouldn't like to have a White Lady in the family.'

'Make your mind easy, dear Mrs. Grubb,' said Aunt Mandeville, with an aristocratic politeness which would have cut anybody less obtuse than Mrs. Grubb into halves—'make your mind easy. You are never likely to have a White Lady in your family.'

'I hope not said the now utterly reckless and

incorrigible Grubb, 'if all I have heard of the lady's conduct is true. Why, it's the talk of the village that she killed her own child, threw it out of the window into the court-yard, and then went and drowned herself in the moat. It would be no honour to have such an ancestor.'

Before he could do any more harm with his tongue,—and let me tell you so much had never been said about or against the White Lady at Mandeville Hall within the memory of man—Mr. Grubb was hushed up by his wife, and surrounded by me and Mr. St. Faith, who, under pretence of showing him a new flower, carried him off to the conservatory, and there explained to his besotted comprehension, that of all things Mrs. Mandeville hated, it was to hear any observations made about the White Lady.

'It is not that she believes in the story, Mr. Grubb,' said Mr. St. Faith; 'but she does not like it. Least of all does she like any village gossip about it.'

'Oh, I see!' said Mr. Grubb. 'I'll never say anything more about it; but I thought Mrs. Mandeville might like to know what all the parish is saying.'

After that, we brought him back in a penitent state, and in a little while he and Mrs. Grubb departed.

Mr. St. Faith followed, and then we all went to bed.

‘Only one day more!’ Arethusa whispered to me, as she bade me good night.

Only one day more! And Arethusa had only been with us ten days. This was what Aunt Mandeville’s month had come to,—and it was all Mary Harbury’s fault.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW I PARTED FROM ARETHUSA, AND HOW MARY
HARBURY LEFT US.

I HAD little sleep that night, and in the morning I was up even before the lark. You must remember that even larks don't rise so very early in the middle of September. It was hours before the rest of them came down. I express myself very badly. I mean I was up hours before the rest came down; I wandered about the park; I sauntered up and down the terrace; I looked up at Arethusa's window, as, I have told you, I stared at her bedroom window in South Street; I plucked a rose for her, and pulled it to pieces; another, and it shared the same fate; they were the last roses of summer,—not one of them good enough for her; I went into the conservatory, and gathered a nosegay of rare flowers. I am afraid some of Aunt Mandeville's pets fared badly, as I plucked bloom after bloom at random. I saw Susan and Mary Jane busy at their work as housemaids,—I need

not say they had thought better of their notice to quit, and preferred to keep a good place; I saw Brooks emerge from his den, and look with fishy eyes—as fishy as those which my fancy most unfairly gave to Mary Harbury—round the Hall, to see that no one had run away with anything in the night; I saw the footmen laying the cloth for breakfast,—in fact, I saw everything that happened in a domestic way that morning in the Hall; and if any young gentleman is troubled with the habit of oversleeping himself in the morning, all I can say is, let him fall in love with a pretty girl, and be just about to be parted from her for an indefinite time, and he will be as wakeful and restless as Argus with his hundred eyes.

At last they came down, Aunt Mandeville as placid as usual. I never saw her ruffled in the morning. Colonel Chichester, the very pink of neatness and politeness. Arethusa struck me as not looking careworn enough, seeing that our separation was so near. See what an exacting thing love is, ye fancy-free young ladies and gentlemen, and don't let the little tyrant into your hearts. If he is sulky or sleepless, or worn or weary, he expects all his victims to be in the same plight, or he flies off at once into a passion of jealousy. I even caught myself saying: 'Why, she looks as fresh as though she had slept twelve hours at least; and

now I remember it, her window-blinds were close drawn down at eight o'clock.'

But our separation was nearer even than I had expected. Among the letters on the table was one from Aunt Buller to Colonel Chichester. It could not have been an answer to Arethusa's letter, because you know that was only written the day before. Colonel Chichester was a man of the world; and, I am sorry to say that such men sometimes tell fibs when it suits their purpose. They are like what the Papists are said to be,—I daresay quite unjustly. They think the end justifies the means. Far be it from me to accuse Arethusa's father of anything; but it certainly was odd, particularly after he had made that very diplomatic speech the evening before, to hear him say to Aunt Mandeville: 'Just as I thought, my dear Madam'—He only called Auntie Madam on great occasions. He used it as sparingly as the Lord Mayor's gilt coach—'Just as I thought, my dear Madam. Here is that letter which I told you I was expecting from Aunt Buller. She says she is in great trouble, and wants us to go back to Devonshire at once.'

'Dear me! I am so sorry,' said Aunt Mandeville. Crocodile I called her in my heart, to say such words, when I knew she wished my darling had never entered the house.

‘Dear me! I am so sorry!’ said Mary Harbury, with a voice of genuine sorrow. ‘How dull it will be to go back to Harbury without you, dear Arethusa!’

How charming is the ease with which young ladies fall in love with each other on a week’s acquaintance, and how fortunate is the speed with which such affections are effaced!

Arethusa, to her credit, did not reply in such a gushing strain; but she said something nice to Mary Harbury.

For myself I said nothing. Had I been free at all, I should have wondered at the dexterity with which the Chichesters were making their retreat from an untenable position, and at the courtesy with which Aunt Mandeville furthered their wishes.

‘What a pity it is,’ said the Colonel, ‘that those railways of which we hear so much, and see so little done, are nowhere except on paper! If they were in existence, and if one might believe all those long prospectuses which the directors issue as a bait to catch unwary shareholders, one might get into a carriage at Birmingham and be carried right away into Devonshire. They even have the face to say that they could run a train from London to South Molton in eight hours,—what do you think of that, Mrs. Mandeville?’

‘I shall think nothing of it until I see it. But forgive me for saying, if you really mean to go to-day, and as railways do not exist as yet in this part of England at least, that you ought to take some steps for your journey. I shall be most happy to send you as far as Warwick.’

‘That will do very nicely,’ said the Colonel, whose only object was to leave Mandeville Hall as quickly as he could; ‘when we reach Warwick we will try and get to Oxford to-night, and so post on, as we came, by Bath.’

‘After luncheon, then,’ said Aunt Mandeville, ‘the carriage shall be at your service, I wish it had been *possible* for you and Miss Chichester to have paid us a longer visit.’

Aunt Mandeville spoke ‘possible,’ as I have written it in italics. Arethusa and her father and myself understood very well what she meant, and so did Mary Harbury. She was not the goose which Arethusa declared her to be.

So they were going, and going at once, in four hours and a half. Fancy my feelings when I found that Colonel Chichester, by his diplomatic storytelling had robbed me of ever so many hours out of the twenty-four which when I got up that morning I expected them still to stay. Yes, four hours and a half only; it was then ten, and at half-past two Brooks was told to order the

carriage to take Colonel and Miss Chichester to Warwick.

‘Could Miss Chichester ever be ready in time?’

‘Oh, yes! Parkins was a famous packer.’

How I wished that Parkins, —that was the name of Arethusa’s maid,—had never been born. What right had she to aid and abet in carrying Arethusa away from me? Much in the same way a convicted felon about to be executed complains of the turn-key who brings him his breakfast—of which, be it remembered, it is always recorded that ‘the wretched criminal partook [with avidity]’—that he is shortening his life and hastening the approaching end.

In fact, I was wild and dangerous with grief, and even silly in my wrath. I felt very much like a child who runs and hides herself under a bed when any visitor comes, and only reappears to find the visitor gone and dinner over. Once or twice I thought I would order my horse and ride over to Lady Meredith’s, and so escape the pangs of parting. But on third thoughts I resolved to stay; Arethusa would think me a coward, if I did not brave it out, and that I could not bear.

I was rewarded by a last *tête-à-tête* with Arethusa, a very short one, only for two minutes, when she shot like a sunbeam through the hall into

the conservatory in an interval of packing. She had forgotten a pair of gloves, but I was enchanted to find she had not forgotten me. Who can tell what we said and did in those two minutes, when at every second of them Aunt Mandeville might have come upon us, thinking of nothing on earth but ourselves, and in all the insolent security of parting lovers? Yes! in such cases love is blind indeed, and being blind will post no sentinels. Our words were as lovers' words always are in such cases, repetitions—vain repetitions to all the rest of the world—interjections, ejaculations, sobs and sighs. Shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand we sat. No! I will not tell you any more; the very recollection maddens me. But I remember, as one of the things which I may tell you, that Arethusa said again, I 'need be under no alarm as to Papa. He would always do what she wished, and he really wished to stay at Mandeville Hall, as much—no! not quite so much as I wish to stay; only you see there is no help for it; no "*possibility*," as your Aunt so well put it.'

Then we swore always to love one another, and to be ever faithful and constant.

Arethusa's last words still ring in my ears.

'Now my dearest Edward, if you hear any stories about me don't believe them, and rely on my not believing any about you. There, go.'

And then she shot upstairs again, and I saw her no more.

After those two minutes all was the merest routine—the mere mechanism of parting. Down she came dressed, looking as though she were going to fresh conquests. Brooks was busy speeding the parting guests, and the packer Parkins appeared with a great nosegay which the gardener had given her, and before she got up into the rumble she kissed her hand to Mrs. Jellybag, who surveyed the scene from one of the upper windows.

I was looking out of the window in a distracted state, hiding my face from the rest of them, and pretending to see that their luggage was all right.

After they had bolted their luncheon, the fatal moment had arrived, a procession was formed from the condemned cell—the dining-room,—to the scene of execution—the Hall-door. The two criminals, the polite old Colonel and Arethusa, shook hands warmly with all of us. To Aunt Mandeville Arethusa said : ‘ Good-bye, dear Mrs. Mandeville,’ and to Mary Harbury, sampler in hand, she gave a kiss. To me she simply said : ‘ Remember.’ Then she tripped down the steps to the scaffold—I beg pardon, the family carriage—which looked to me as gloomy as a hearse. Brooks, who played the part

of Mr. Calcraft, slammed to the door and turned the handle—and they were gone.

‘Now, Mary,’ said Aunt Mandeville, ‘come and take a walk with me. I want to go and see old Betty Blink, and after that we can go round by the Rectory, and you can show Mr. St. Faith your pretty sampler. Edward, I believe, is going out for a ride.’

How Aunt Mandeville arrived at that belief I am sure I can’t tell; but, that it might prove true, I ordered that horse on which I had been so anxious to ride over to Lady Meredith’s in the morning, and rode him to Warwick to try to see some of the Heavies.

Now it was a strange thing, but not the less true, that no one was ever known to go to Warwick without meeting Major Plunger. He was either at the barracks, or in the Castle grounds, or at the curiosity-shop, or in the Beauchamp Chapel, or in the High Street, or at the ‘Dun Cow,’ or at the ‘Bear and Ragged Staff.’ Somewhere in the town he was sure to be, and always walking about. In the hunting-season he went out with the hounds, and when the Regiment was exercised and paraded he appeared on his charger; but at other times he was always walking. Nine times out of ten, too, Twentyman was with him. And as the Major was five feet six and the Cornet six feet five, endless

were the jokes cut on them by their friends, and even by strangers. I need not say that they were great friends, or the Major would never have chosen the gigantic Cornet to be his companion on the visit to Mandeville Hall.

As I rode over the bridge, I saw 'Long and Short,' as they were often called, standing close together and looking down into the water.

I do not know, though I had come to see some of the Heavies, that I should not have passed this pair, as I was afraid they might laugh at me about Mary Harbury; but I think Major Plunger must have had eyes in his head, for he turned short round as I rode up, and said:

'Ah, Halfacre, how are you?'

'Pretty well. I am just taking a ride. The Hall is empty again; all our guests are gone except Miss Harbury.'

'Why, I thought you said the Chichesters were going to stay a month?' said the stolid Twentyman.

'So they were; but urgent private business,—a phrase which I believe you soldiers well understand,—called them suddenly away this morning.'

'And where are they gone to?' asked the Major.

'To Devonshire, to see an aunt of Miss Chichester's.'

‘Tell you who’ll be deuced sorry to hear that,’ drawled out Twentymen, each word following the other far more slowly than if it were extracted by a dentist.

‘Who?’

‘Well, “Toif,” as the Major calls him. He did nothing but rave about Miss Chichester all the way here; only yesterday——’

This really was too good a joke, and I burst out laughing.

‘What are you laughing at?’ said the giant, bristling up. I really believe he thought I was laughing at him.

‘Oh, at nothing. At something which I was thinking about before I saw you, and which came back on me just then, and made me laugh. It was very rude, but I really couldn’t help it. And so Count Manteuffel raved about Miss Chichester. Pray what did he say, and how did he show his raving?’

‘He said he thought you were a very silly fellow to fall in love with Miss Harbury while Miss Chichester was in the house, and if he were lord of Mandeville Hall—that was his fine way of putting it—he would marry Miss Chichester on the spot, and never think of Mary Harbury and her ring fence.’

‘And that you call raving,—I call it common

sense. Miss Harbury is not to be compared, in my opinion, to Miss Chichester.'

'Ah! but you sly dog,' said Major Plunger, 'you forget the ring fence.'

'Confound the ring fence!' I burst out in a rage. 'Let me tell you, Major, that I don't care for the ring fence; nor do I care in the least for Miss Harbury. I have told you so at least twenty times, and yet you always cast Miss Harbury and her ring fence in my teeth.'

'Sorry for it; sorry for you, for Miss Harbury, and for the two estates,' said Twentyman; 'that's what I call throwing away an opportunity. Very like not purchasing a step when you have the money lodged at your banker's.'

'Just what I say,' said the Major; 'you'll go further and fare worse. Besides, who's to marry Miss Harbury, after all that happened last week, if you don't?'

'Nothing happened but what was accidental, and a man is not bound to marry a girl by accident. I don't care who marries Miss Harbury. She is a good, nice girl, I daresay, for some other man, but not for me.'

'Well, but it's all over the county,' said the Major.

'I don't care. If you hear the rumour again, please contradict it. But you were talking of

Count Manteuffel. He is not going to leave Warwickshire, is he?’

‘Oh, no; not he,’ said Twentyman, with an odious grin; ‘he’s too much smitten for that; hit here;’ and he touched his heart.

‘Smitten with whom?’

‘With Miss Chichester, to be sure; didn’t I tell you he raves about her? Only this morning he said he must ride over to Mandeville Hall to thank Mrs. Mandeville over again. Don’t believe him if he comes; it is only to see Miss Chichester.’

‘Very silly,’ was all I said.

‘Yes; but the wisest men are sometimes silly, and foreign counts, it seems, are no exception. He reckons, too, on seeing Miss Chichester very soon again. He will be hunting at Leamington all the winter, and Colonel Chichester is bent upon doing the same. So they are sure to meet.’

‘I don’t think he has much chance with Miss Chichester,’ I said, dryly. ‘The Count had better turn his eyes to Harbury, if he is so anxious for an English alliance.’

‘Yes; but you see, he, like you, prefers beauty to broad acres.’

‘By the way,’ said the Major, ‘I don’t think this Toif worth talking about. No English girl would marry a foreigner. I hate foreigners; but that’s not what I wanted to say. I’ve got

some leave.' He spoke of leave in such a matter-of-fact way one would have thought the Horse Guards sold it by the pound. 'I've got some leave, and I'm going to spend it abroad—in Corfu—with my brother, who's in the Artillery. You don't know any fellow who wants a pleasant travelling companion? If so I'm ready to join him. You can give me the best character. I'm the sweetest temper in the world, and I never quarrel with any one if they will only let me have my own way, and let me sleep, eat, drink, and smoke as much as I please. In these respects my habits are most regular; and in the evening I sometimes feel so happy that a child might gambol with me.'

'A very poetical description of a very selfish fellow,' said Twentyman, out of whose mouth, as out of those of babes and sucklings, wisdom often comes quite unawares.

'Well! Major,' I said, 'if ever I find any one willing to travel with you on those terms I'll certainly let you know; I suppose by "happy" you mean the state in which British officers are described after dinner in Irish novels. It's all gone by now, I know. But that's what you mean by "happy"?''

And with that I rode off, the Major shaking his fist at me as I went, and calling out, 'Remember me to Miss Harbury.'

As I rode home I caught myself vaguely repeating several times, 'Raving about Miss Chichester,' and then I thought, it is simply ridiculous. He never made the slightest approach to Miss Chichester, and, had he done so, I am sure she would never have given him the least encouragement. He is very nice and gentlemanlike, and an agreeable talker, and has seen the world, but it seemed to me the only person who cared to talk to him, and to whom he cared to talk, was Aunt Mandeville. I really thought, as Major Plunger coarsely expressed it, he had taken the length of her foot. But Arethusa! it is too absurd.

It was late before I got back, and it was a relief to find that for that night, Mary Harbury's last night, we were to have the company of Mr. St. Faith.

He came, and was as pleasant as ever. Aunt Mandeville was very grave, and Mary Harbury seemed very dull, with the dulness of a bird that has lost its cage-mate and won't be comforted for a season,—I don't mean a London season, but for a short time. She was pining for Arethusa Chichester, into whose arms she used to throw herself in that silly wild sort of way which some young ladies affect, and which, I believe means very little.

I, of course, pined much for my Arethusa, and felt her loss all the more that I had not, like Mary Harbury, been always rushing into her arms like a stage lover.

‘How stupid Mr. Grubb was last night!’ said my Aunt Mandeville. ‘If there is anything that I hate it is low village gossip. If what the parish says of its betters is no better than those fictions which Mr. Grubb brought with him and poured out so heedlessly, the less we hear of parish opinion the better.’

‘It was very stupid of him, no doubt,’ said Mr. St. Faith, who really in the kindness of his nature would have found an excuse for Judas Iscariot; ‘but then you see, my dear Mrs. Mandeville, we gentlemen had sat a little too long after dinner, and on such occasions Mr. Grubb is sometimes not very tractable. He gets dogmatic and dictatorial, and is apt to lay down the law. It is the old story, “When the wine is in the wit is out,” and we mustn’t be too hard upon Mr. Grubb. I’m sure I don’t know how I should get on without him on the bench. Mr. Edward is not yet a magistrate, and Lord Meredith is little at home. There is, practically speaking, no man either at Harbury or Mandeville Halls; so Mr. Grubb and Mr. Pursey and myself have to do a deal of work at Petty Sessions, and I assure you that, were

it not that I and Mr. Grubb go hand in hand, we should never get through our business, for, as is well known, dear Mr. Pursey is not fit for much.'

So he went on, throwing his shield over the social delinquencies of Mr. Grubb, and finding a good word for him too, as he had found for Betty Blink.

How grateful I was to him for helping us through that evening I can never say! When he was gone and the evening was over I said to myself: 'My first evening without Arethusa, and, thank heaven, my last with Mary Harbury.'

Next morning Mary Harbury went away too. I believe she, too, had urgent private reasons, but I never stopped to inquire what they were. She thanked me again rather prettily for saving her life, to which I am afraid I gave rather a rude answer, that I 'would have done the same for any one in the world.' I am not quite sure that I did not say that I would have done it for any animal. Had I been the Count, of course I should have said I would not have done it for any one else except herself; but then I was not the Count.

'Well! I'm just as grateful to you all the same,' said Mary Harbury as she stepped into the carriage.

Did she take her sampler with her? I believe she did; at any rate we never saw it any more

at Mandeville Hall. No doubt any one who chose to take the trouble to test this most truthful story, and to come, say all the way from Inverness, by express train to Harbury, would find that precious sampler framed and glazed in a black ebony frame in the village school, as a pattern to countless school children, past and to come. Would he find Mary Harbury still there? I am not going to tell you, but after so many years I daresay Mary Harbury's sampler has worn much better than Mary Harbury herself.

What did Aunt Mandeville do or say while Mary Harbury was going? Not very much of either. She was not very demonstrative. She knew, too, it was no use, after my declaration of two days before, trying to make me like Mary Harbury just then. She felt baffled and thwarted; but she was like the modern Greeks, nothing will ever induce them to give up their 'grand idea' of kicking the Turks out of Europe, and out of Asia Minor too, and they go on nursing their project all the more because it seems so hopeless. So it was with Aunt Mandeville. I am as certain as I, Edward Halfacre, am of my own identity, that, as Mary Harbury drove off under a volley of kisses from her hostess, Aunt Mandeville said in her heart: 'I shall live to see them man and wife, and Harbury and Mandeville united in a ring fence.'

‘Poor Aunt Mandeville.’

‘And what will you do, Edward?’ she said as turned from the door.

‘I was thinking of riding over to Meredith Hall and seeing Lady Meredith, she is always so good and kind to me.’

‘A very good idea; go by all means. It is a long ride, but you will have a fine day. I wish though you would think, Edward, that there is no one who wishes to be better or kinder to you than I. But then,’—and here came a bitter end like the moral of a fable,—‘you must not thwart my wishes.’

With these words that most amiable female tyrant turned away and left me to myself. In half-an-hour I was trotting across the park to Meredith Hall.

END OF VOL. II.

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VOL. II.

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